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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how a contemporary, popular media program such as "The Real World" (on MTV) can be used most effectively in the classroom to illustrate the basic concepts of interpersonal, group, and family communication. The 21 individual 22-minute episodes of the second season of "The Real World" (a combination of video-verite techniques and staged interviews with seven real young people--not actors--who were selected to share a house in Venice, California while their lives were captured on videotape) were subjected to a content analysis. Results indicated in a group or family setting), and the role of communication climate were particularly well represented; (2) the mix of the house members provided numerous illustrations of cultural influences on communication; (3) the roles of uncertainty reduction and self-disclosure were well illustrated, but the series tended to emphasize group situations over dyadic contexts; and (4) family communication was illustrated less directly than communication concepts that apply across contexts. Future research is planned to determine the most effective ways of using "The Real World" and similar programs in the communication classroom. Findings take the form of a curriculum guide. (Contains 73 references. Appendixes present the curriculum guide--which provides detailed descriptions, communication concepts illustrated, and discussion questions for each of the 21 episodes--a list of general communication concepts presented in "The Real World," a chart to guide in the selection of appropriate episodes to illustrate specific communication concepts, and 12 endnotes.) (RS)

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Here In The Real World:

MTV Meets The Communication Classroom

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Abstract

How can contemporary, popular media be used most effectively in the communication classroom to illustrate the basic concepts of interpersonal, group, and family communication? While an instructor may consider a film contemporary, from the students' perspective, many are dated. Feature length motion pictures are problematic in that they require a great deal of class time. Further, they employ fictional characters that change from movie to movie, making it difficult to compare communication behaviors over time and across contexts.

Audio-visual materials have long been used in both advanced and introductory courses in speech communication. The availability of inexpensive video playback equipment has eased the task of using films in the classroom; the availability of thousands of movie titles provides a wide range of possible software. They are used to illustrate particular communication behaviors or as cues to prompt discussion of basic communication concepts. The use of appropriate, contemporary, popular media appears to result in a high level of involvement by university students enrolled in basic communication courses.

In the spring of 1992, *MTV* began airing a series of programs titled *The Real World*. Seven young people who began as strangers were selected to share a loft in New York City while their daily lives were captured on videotape. The participants were real individuals, not actors, who faced real problems, resulting in a series that is rich in examples of interpersonal, group and family communication. Through a systematic content analysis of each of the 21 episodes of the second (1993) season of *The Real World*, a curriculum guide has been produced that identifies basic communication concepts illustrated by the show and includes suggestions for activities.

Here In The Real World:

MTV Meets The Communication Classroom

Cowboys don't cry, and heroes don't die.

Good always wins, again and again.

And love is a sweet dream, that always comes true.

If life was a movie, I'd never be blue.

But here in the real world, it's not that easy at all.

— Alan Jackson

It was another warm day in American Samoa. A somewhat nervous young educator prepared to debut on *educational television*.[1] The technology and federal funding available in 1959 allowed for nothing more than a single black-and-white camera mounted in a fixed position and pointed at a lectern and chalkboard. Just as in many other classrooms around the world, as the clock marked the top of the hour, the lecture began. The event was exciting because it was television; it was dull because it did nothing more than transmit the image of an instructor standing rigidly in front of a camera. Thirty-five years later, educators are still struggling to make effective use of the medium.

How can contemporary, popular media be used most effectively in the classroom to illustrate the basic concepts of interpersonal, group, and family communication? Is there a genre that is particularly well suited to illustrating basic communication concepts? Specifically, is there a television show that, if properly used, can serve as an exemplar of media use in the basic

communication course? We have only to look to *The Real World* (Bunim & Murray, 1993) for one possible answer.[2]

Rationale

Feature films and commercial television programs in the classroom are hardly a new idea (Proctor, 1990; Smith, 1973). Audio-visual materials have long been used in both advanced and introductory courses in speech communication to illustrate particular communication behaviors or to act as cues to prompt discussion of basic communication concepts (Foss, 1983; Foss & Kanengieter, 1992). The availability of inexpensive video equipment has eased the task of using films and television shows in the classroom; the availability of thousands of movie titles, coupled with both commercial and public television programming, provide a wide range of possible software (Considine, 1989). The choice of *which* programs and how they will be used is generally left to the discretion of individual instructors.

Over the years, several essays have appeared that offer guidance for the use of media, particularly feature films, in the speech classroom (e.g., Alex, 1988; Haefner & Metts, 1990; Rebhorn, 1987). Proctor and Adler (1991) note that "film use is popular and probably extensive in the communication classroom, particularly in classes focused on interpersonal communication" (p. 393). Even though a wide variety of material is available, instructors tend to rely on a relatively small group of films, repeating them from term to term and class to class.[3] While instructors may consider a film contemporary, from the students' perspective, many included on the Proctor and Adler (1991) list are dated. Feature length motion pictures are also problematic in that they require a great deal of class time. Further, they employ fictional characters that change from movie to movie, making it difficult to compare communication behaviors over time and across contexts.

By contrast, television programs are generally shorter than feature films and provide examples of a continuing cast of characters across a wide variety of contemporary situations. This appears to offer at least a partial solution to the problems posed by feature films. Though some types of communication behaviors are generously represented in commercial television programming, other forms of communication are surprisingly rare. Family communication, particularly examples of significant interactions between partners, are scarce. According to Fitzpatrick (1991):

> Conversations between intimates were so hard to find that I began to question the importance of communication to the family process. How could our central relationships in the family be formed, maintained, and dissolved through talk (as many of us believe) and yet have little of that process appear in popular cultural presentations? (p. 216)

Fitzpatrick (1991) also notes that soap operas are not the answer. Review of two hundred hours of soap opera viewing yielded no examples of marital interaction fulfilling the rules established by the researchers.[4]

Many academic departments maintain a video library of past experimental sessions that could serve as *real world* examples of communication behaviors, but there are serious ethical considerations that preclude their use. In a search for appropriate experimental stimuli for use in family communication research, Fitzpatrick (1991) notes that in order to protect the confidentiality of one's research participants, it is also unethical to use previously videotaped interactions of actual marital dialogue.

There are several possible solutions to these problems. One is to write and produce appropriate examples using actors and actresses to portray real life situations. This approach is both time consuming, expensive, and in many cases the end product is of very poor quality. Even

the videos sometimes packaged with communication textbooks are poorly produced making them far too reminiscent of *educational television* on American Samoa in 1959.

If feature films are too long, custom video too time consuming and expensive to produce effectively, and television shows (including soap operas) not reflective of certain types of communication behavior, what then can we turn to for classroom examples? Given that the use of appropriate, contemporary, popular media appears to result in a high level of involvement by university students (Imig, 1981; Smith 1973, 1982) the difficulty of our search is justified by the potential benefits of locating appropriate material. One possible answer can be found in cinema or video-vérité — literally, film of life — a genre that is characterized by its documentary style and lack of narration. The participants tell their own stories through their actions, not through a script.

An American Family Meets *The Real World*

In the spring of 1992, *MTV* aired a series of programs titled *The Real World*, consisting of 13 half-hour episodes broadcast on a weekly basis.[5] The programs depicted seven young people (aged 18-25) who were selected to share a loft in New York City while their daily lives were captured on videotape. During the first six months of 1993, a second series (21 episodes) of *The Real World* was filmed at a Venice, California beach house; a new family of seven strangers was selected for the project. A third series, filmed in San Francisco, began airing in June 1994.

The concept is distantly related to the 1973 cinema-vérité documentary series produced for public television by WNET that featured the Louds of Santa Barbara, California. *An American Family* (Raymond & Raymond, 1973) consisted of 12 one-hour programs produced from film shot over a six month period (Loud, 1974).[6] According to Susan and Alan Raymond (personal communication, January 17, 1994), the filmmakers who created *An American Family*, the resemblance between their documentary presentation of the Louds and the *MTV* series is superficial at best. These issues, which are potentially very important, will be explored later.

Regardless, both projects are rich in examples of interpersonal and group communication and illustrate the communication that occurs among members of a traditional family and a modern communal family. While *An American Family* is attractive as a teaching tool because it remains true to cinema-vérité and documentary style, it is dated.[7]

The Real World sacrifices some of its credibility in order to gain audience ratings. It is in effect part of a new genre of television programming.[8] It is partially documentary in nature employing video-vérité techniques to capture events as they actually happen. It strays from the genre in that additional staged interviews are conducted. The combination of scenes is then edited together using aesthetics popularized by *MTV* to create a highly contemporary look and sound designed to appeal to their audience. But our goal is not to critique the artistic value of *The Real World*. The question is not whether this is great television but whether it serves as an effective teaching tool.

Each episode (minus commercial announcements) is 22 minutes long allowing an entire episode to be used comfortably during a 50 minute or longer class session. The participants are real individuals, not actors, who face real problems. These characteristics provide us with examples that are close to *real* rather than staged without introducing ethical problems. The similarity in age between university students and the family members of *The Real World*, coupled with the diversity of backgrounds represented on the program, encourages high involvement by students. A pilot study conducted by the author during the 1993/1994 academic school year showed that students preferred examples from *The Real World* to other videotapes used in class.[9] Why is this particular series so popular with students? A review of the literature suggests a number of elements that may be at work.

Literature Review

Film, Television, and Other Media In The Classroom

Lovell (1987) reminds us that the "introduction to film course" has been a part of the undergraduate curriculum in many universities for years. Purcell (1971) and Klemer and Smith (1975), offer suggestions for the use of film in family studies. Work by a number of scholars across the curriculum have shown film and television to be worthwhile adjuncts to classroom instruction. In 1968, Don Smith (1973) began a project to teach introductory sociology using feature films to augment classroom lectures and discussions. In order to investigate the effect of using film in the classroom, Smith arranged to concurrently teach other sections of the same class without using film. Students in those sections that included film use reported a higher level of interest in the class and a higher likelihood of taking additional courses in the discipline. Over time, Smith adjusted the amount of time viewing films to where in 1977 it constituted 60 percent of all class sessions. Smith's thesis is similar to that offered in this paper. Smith (1982) says:

> The lessons of undergraduate sociology are to be found in many resources other than explicitly educational materials. . . . Contemporary feature films often carry competent sociological information and cogently express many of the basic sociology lessons in a manner of great interest to undergraduate students. (p. 98)

In a study that tested the effectiveness of film as a stimulus for the measurement of learning in family life classes, Imig (1981) found that "although students acknowledged the value of film in the evaluation process, students appeared to experience considerable anxiety about using films as parts of tests" (p. 261). As a result, Imig arranged to include films as part of the regular instructional process in order to "minimize the novelty effect of film in testing" (p. 261). The results were mixed; once integrated into the curriculum, film neither helped nor hindered test

performance. Imig did not attempt to assess students' satisfaction with the course or the use of film.

Considine (1989) notes that "the lessons we teach them [students] and the methods we use are often dull compared with the bright, rapid-paced, highly sensory electronic environment beyond the classroom" (p. 232). Although films vary in the degree to which they accurately represent historical events, Considine (1989) expresses the belief that such films still serve the useful purpose of motivating students and making the past more accessible in the classroom.

Foss and Kanengieter (1992) argue that the need for visual communication skills is vital to an understanding of the human communication process, yet it is often ignored in the basic course. While being very explicit that their observations are not limited to only mass-mediated images, Foss and Kanengieter acknowledge that film and television are an important part of competent visual communication. By inference, the proper use of film and television in the classroom will not only reinforce more traditional learning, but also offer an opportunity to illustrate the importance of visual literacy.

Seminal work by Glennon and Butsch (1982) provides us with an understanding of the evolution of family portrayals on television from 1946-1978. Greenberg, Buerkel-Rothfuss, Neuendorf, and Atkin (1980) followed up with a study of three seasons of television family role interactions. While both studies suggest that family interactions on television are anything but real, that does not preclude the possibility that television families may be useful in illustrating family communication concepts. Chesebro (1979) looked beyond family interactions alone to provide an analysis of both the communication and values presented on television. An even broader approach is taken by Hawkins, Wiemann, and Pingree (1988) who posit that mass and interpersonal communication processes are merging.

According to Long and Grant (1992), the teaching of family communication is facilitated through the use of short stories. Even though the discussion guide they offer as an example is based on the written word rather than a film or television show, their observations seem apropos to this discussion and might have just as easily been written about a popular television show. They note that, "Fiction seems an especially appropriate resource for the study of family communication because the conflicts and issues in fictional families are almost always indeterminate enough to encourage multiple interpretations" (p. 89).

A study by Fallis, Fitzpatrick, and Friestad (1985) has important implications for the use of television programs in the family communication classroom. In an examination of how spouses discuss television portrayals of close relationships, they found that marital schema affect the responsiveness of partners to relationship-oriented television content. Only when an individual's own schemata are inconsistent with the content of a program are they likely to attend to the program and discuss it with their partners. Even under these conditions it is necessary that the content of the show be considered relevant to their own situation. In other words, if the condition described by Fallis, Fitzpatrick, and Friestad (1985) holds true in the classroom as well, a film that challenges the views held by a majority of the students is more likely to be attended to and discussed than one that merely reinforces existing schema.

The nature of *The Real World*, as previously noted, gives it both an aura of fiction and reality. By necessity, the format of the show introduces the type of indeterminate situations described by Long and Grant (1992). Even though the participants in the show are real people, they remain largely unknown to the students in the classroom, allowing for the type of full expression Long and Grant describe.

In an analysis of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Winegarden, Fuss-Reineck, and Charron (1993), offer a number of suggestions for using the program as a teaching device for

family communication. They note the variety of family systems and family roles present among the crew. Cultural diversity is a mainstay of the *Star Trek* message as well. Finally, the relationships between family life and ecosystems are illustrated. Ecosystem is used in this context to describe the "hierarchy of systems that both comprise and surround the family" (p. 184). While *The Real World* does not encompass the vast diversity represented on *Star Trek*, it nevertheless provides a variety of similar examples.

Some in the communication field have gone far beyond using film and television and other more traditional forms of fiction to illustrate principles of human communication. Ulrich (1986) and VanOosting (1985) note that several scholars have attempted to build theory based on interpretation of fictive texts (e.g., Kougl, 1983). Ulrich (1986) urges caution noting that "it is one thing to draw upon a work of fiction to illustrate a theory of communication. The use of fiction to *prove* that such a theory is valid raises other issues" (pp. 143-144, italics in original). While *The Real World* blurs the line between fiction and reality, no attempt will be made here to suggest that its content is generalizable to new theories, only that it provides examples of existing theoretical concepts.

Commercial Programs In The Classroom

Using commercial television programming in the classroom raises a number of important issues. These issues are slowly being resolved but deserve to be considered before we proceed to evaluate the usefulness of programs like *The Real World*. At the present time, such programs are only available for use under limited conditions. Generally, under fair-use guidelines, commercial programs may only be taped for a single delayed replay in the classroom and then must be erased (Reed, 1989). Through an effort by the Cable Alliance for Education, a number of cable programmers are offering programs for extended educational use. The *Cable In The Classroom* initiative came about in direct response to efforts by Christopher Whittle to introduce commercial

programming into high school classrooms in return for an average of $50,000 worth of video equipment and distribution systems (Birmingham, 1990; Evans, 1989; Stump 1990). Whittle is an entrepreneur who has successfully developed a number of media services designed for captive audiences such as those in doctors' offices and schools. Whittle's *Channel One* broadcast for schools is a 12-minute news program that includes two minutes of commercials. Unlike Whittle's services, programs that are part of *Cable In The Classroom* are provided commercial free, but the school is responsible for providing its own equipment.[10] In spite of opposition, Whittle's *Channel One* service continues to operate and has been successful in attracting a large number of schools (Skelly, 1991).

The bulk of the programming offered through the cable industry's initiative consists of news, science, and history programs targeted for grades K - 12.[11] For example, Ted Turner's Cable News Network produces a 15 minute commercial free newscast that directly competes with the Whittle program. Nickleodeon (an MTV network) provides a weekly 30 minute news magazine program. The Discovery Channel, one of the largest providers of programming for *Cable In The Classroom*, makes available special commercial-free versions of programs from its regular schedule. None of the four major television networks participate in the program. Affiliates of PBS have been slow to join the effort but now do participate in a limited fashion (PBS Goes To School, 1991).

In the fall of 1993, *Music Television* (MTV) furthered their commitment to *Cable In The Classroom* by creating the *Community of the Future* series. The highly acclaimed documentary *A Generation Under The Gun* is being provided commercial-free for extended classroom use. Additional programs are planned. The possibility exists for other programs, such as *The Real World*, to be distributed for educational use in a similar fashion. The process is not a simple one, however, since it is necessary for the cable programmer to obtain educational rights to the program

— something that has not traditionally even been considered. Often, the cost is minimal and serves as an effective means to enhance public service and the image of the cable industry.

The Real World — An Interpersonal Soap Opera/MTV Show

A number of reviews of *The Real World* have been published (e.g., Coe, 1992; Dean, 1992; Huff, 1992; Leland, 1992; O'Conner, 1993; Robichaux, 1992; Zoglin, 1992); interestingly, one of the few non-review articles available on the series describes the participation of *The Real World I* ensemble in an advertising campaign for Chevrolet (Elliott, 1992). One of the more enlightening pieces about the production is provided by Diana Moneta (1992). According to Moneta, Bunim/Murray Productions dismissed the idea of searching for an existing set of roommates opting instead to "assemble the ensemble one by one, advertising casting calls for anyone willing to share an apartment with six other strangers" (p. 39). Bill Richmond, one of the directors, explained that the plan for *The Real World* was to "follow them wherever they go, and we don't direct them" (cited in Moneta, 1992, p. 40).

Editorial director Alan Cohn calls *The Real World* "an interpersonal soap opera/MTV show" (cited in Moneta, 1992, p. 40). He adds that the show attempts to capture the truth of the situation even if it involves contradictions. Cohn summarizes the project noting that the show encompasses several different programming styles, including video-vérité, aspects of music video, and all-original footage. He adds that the most important consideration is that the final product must be entertaining.

The Real World As Documentary

In order to understand the potential appeal of *The Real World*, it is necessary to consider the role of the documentary in our culture and its historical relationship to the study of family communication. The documentary form has long professed to capture *life as it really is* (Bluem, 1965; Hoffer & Nelson, 1973; Jacobs, 1971). But according to Michael Curtin (1993),

documentary programs aired on television during the 1960s were under heavy pressure to be commercially viable — sometimes at the sacrifice of journalistic integrity. The result was often an end product that sacrificed information content for a larger audience and therefore greater profitability for the television networks.

As a project of public television station WNET, *An American Family* attempted to overcome such limitations. Pat Loud (1974), one of the primary subjects of the documentary, maintains that the final editing and the approach taken to promote the show were both highly influenced by public broadcasting's desire to attract audience at the expense of providing as accurate a portrayal of the Loud family as possible. Ultimately, the show did enjoy a certain level of critical acclaim, but was not the success public broadcasters had hoped it would be. Even the noted anthropologist Margaret Mead offered high praise for the endeavor:

> It is, I believe, as new and as significant as the invention of drama or the novel. . . a new way in which people can learn to look at life, by seeing the real life of others interpreted by the camera. (from the 1979 movie by Albert Brooks, *Real Life*)

As *An American Family's* modern step-child, *The Real World* enjoys both commercial success and a substantial audience. Executive producer Jonathan Murray takes exception to the comparison of *The Real World* to *An American Family*. Murray says unlike the PBS series, "We created the situation, the reality" (cited in Moneta, 1992, p. 41). It successfully delivers its target demographics to MTV's advertisers at a price that allows for higher profits than fiction (Leland, 1992).

Director Bill Richmond of *The Real World* argues that the term documentary does not accurately characterize the intent of the show:

> The difference between this show and a documentary is that we're not going at it with a certain point of view. We're letting them tell the story and the focus is on

> their relationships. In that way it's like a soap opera because it's about interpersonal relationships between men, women and friends. (cited in Moneta, 1992, pp. 40-41)

The Real World As Soap Opera

One possible explanation for the popularity of *The Real World* with college students is its resemblance to more traditional daytime soap operas. Cantor and Pingree (1983) report that soap opera is "more likely to generate active participation among viewers than other types of television" (p. 131). The soap opera genre has inspired a great deal of scholarly literature (e.g., Cantor & Pingree, 1983; Cassata & Skill, 1983). Specifically, college student viewing of soap opera has been the focus of a number of experimental investigations. A variety of data collection methods have been used. For example, Lemish (1985) relied on non-intrusive ethnographic and naturalistic research methods in order to investigate what motivates students to watch soap operas. Based on gratification research (e.g., Greenberg, 1974; Lull, 1980), Lemish (1985) began with the premise that soap opera viewers derive gratification across several dimensions including: the content of the medium, the exposure to the medium, and the social context of media use. Lemish chose viewers of *General Hospital* for her study because it seemed particularly appropriate for college audiences. In 1977, the producers altered the content of the show in ways designed to attract a younger audience (Cantor & Pingree, 1983). Based on 55 hours of observation in a sports lounge and the student union, Lemish (1985) found that viewers of soap operas are seeking humor, friends, and trivia. Soap operas serve as an escape from reality; they provide excitement, companionship, relaxation, help with problems, and emotional satisfaction gained from intimate involvement in the lives of characters.

Several studies challenge the notion that soap opera viewers are unable to differentiate reality from fantasy. Greenberg, Neuendorf, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Henderson (1982) found that

soap fans are "intensively involved" (p. 533). Lemish (1985) reports a "high degree of sophistication exhibited by some viewers" in their "ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality" (p. 287). Fine (1981) cautions that soap operas portray a "dream world," but that the soap opera "creates a warm enclosed community in which the participants receive continual nourishment from each other" (p. 106). Alexander (1985) posits that "talk is the mode by which soap opera relationships are created, thrive, and die" (p. 296).

Through factor analysis, Rubin (1985) found that college students report four primary motives for watching soap operas: orientation or reality exploration, avoidance or escape, diversion or amusement, and social utility or interaction. A later study by Babrow (1987) identified 16 motives associated with soap opera viewing by college students. Babrow reports that a number of the categories appear to be multifaceted, noting that soap operas provide an opportunity for socialization, and serve as ways to vicariously experience other people's lives.

Even the aesthetics of soap operas contribute to their perceived meanings. In a content analysis of both U.S. and British soaps, Barbatsis and Guy (1991) attempted to identify the ways in which producers of soap operas construct the illusion that they hope viewers will perceive as reality. They opine that "the invitation of soap opera is, in short, to an experience of 'real life, involving real people'" (p. 59). If we synthesize the information from this research we find that one of the reasons the soap opera genre is popular with college students is because it offers a common reference point for discussion among peers while retaining its entertainment or amusement value. Soap opera is rich in examples of communication behavior. If *The Real World* is perceived as soap opera it appears that it enjoys the best of both worlds — the flexibility of interpretation offered through fiction, and the promise of reality that results from its semi-documentary style.

The Real World Meets The Communication Classroom

A program like *The Real World* is rich in research possibilities. Objections to the terminology by the producers notwithstanding, the episodes that comprise the series make a set of appropriate artifacts for a genre study of soap operas, documentaries, and cinema/video-vérité style. They represent an example of our culture's fascination with reality programming and the blur between the separation not only of reality and fiction, but between public and private spheres, and commercial and educational programming. Additional research is ongoing in an attempt to address some of these issues. For now, we return to the research agenda proposed in the beginning of this paper:

RQ: How can contemporary, popular media be used most effectively in the classroom to illustrate the basic concepts of interpersonal, group, and family communication?

The literature review provides an important corpus of evidence to support the conclusion that a program like *The Real World* is well suited for illustrating communication concepts in the basic course. Based on the evidence, this research assumed a priori that *The Real World* and whatever genre or genres it represents is particularly well suited to college student audiences. A necessary step to providing an answer to the research question posed here must include a systematic content analysis of the program. Even when the research is limited to the 21 episodes of *The Real World II*, the task is an imposing one.

Method

Artifacts

In the case of this research, the subjects under investigation are the 21 individual episodes of *The Real World II*. The second series began airing during the summer of 1993 and continues, in reruns, at this writing (October 1994). The entire series was captured on videotape for research purposes in November 1993 when MTV ran *The Real World Marathon*, airing all 21 episodes several times in a single weekend. Later broadcasts provided backup copies of the programs. Each program is designed to fill a 30 minute slot on MTV's schedule. The actual amount of program material for each episode is approximately 22 minutes. Structurally, each episode begins with a brief recap of previous events and ends with a preview of the next episode, further limiting the new material presented.

Content Analysis

This research project consisted of a systematic content analysis of each of the 21 episodes of *The Real World II*. The method used in this research was inspired by the approaches taken by Foss (1983), Long and Grant (1992), Maynard (1971), Moss (1987), Proctor (1990), Shields and Kidd (1973), Smith (1973, 1982), and Winegarden, Fuss-Reineck, and Charron (1993). Inter-coder reliability is not an issue in either this study or most of those previously cited since the content analysis was performed by a single researcher. Each episode was viewed by the author in its entirety a minimum of three times. The first viewing provided a general context for analysis and the overall theme or themes for the episode. During the second viewing, a check list of items that are commonly discussed in basic interpersonal or family communication courses was applied (see Appendix A). Examples for each category that was identified and their positions within the

program and their length were noted. A final viewing was made to ensure that the examples and major theme of the show worked holistically to provide the best possible illustrations.

After completion of the analysis, a number of suggested learning activities were constructed based on the concepts illustrated in the programs. The resulting curriculum guide is designed so that a number of the activities can be used as individual examples of basic communication principles. Other activities will be more effective when used after viewing two or more episodes or portions of episodes.

This analysis is almost entirely descriptive in nature. No attempt has been made to provide a statistical analysis of the contents of the program. As previously discussed, these are worthy activities but not the focus here. For the purposes of this research, it is not important how many times the concepts of self-disclosure or uncertainty reduction appear in the program; what is important is that the incidents that do occur are noted and indexed for effective classroom use.

Results

The results of this investigation take the form of a separate curriculum guide included as Appendix B. The results are based on the content analysis done by a single observer — the author. Methodological effects resulting from this procedure are included in the discussion section.

The Real World II was found to include at least one example from each of the categories identified in Appendix A. Nonverbal communication, the nature of conflicts (especially in a group or family setting), and the role of communication climate are particularly well represented. The mix of the house members provides numerous illustrations of cultural influences on

communication. Conflicts centered on urban and rural values, gender differences, age, racial differences, sexual preference, religion, and nationality are all part of *The Real World II*.

The roles of uncertainty reduction and self-disclosure are well illustrated, but the series tends to emphasize group situations over dyadic contexts. Additionally, just as Fitzpatrick (1991) found a lack of extended dialogue between partners in soap operas, this content analysis revealed that *The Real World II* is sometimes lacking in direct interpersonal communication. The producers interweave scenes of dyadic and group communication with individual interviews where the members of the house speak directly and only to the camera. Preliminary observations based on student comments and essays have shown that the thoughts and feelings expressed in these individual interviews are sometimes perceived as having actually been a part of the interpersonal communication that took place.

Family communication is illustrated less directly than communication concepts that apply across contexts. In considering the residents of *The Real World* beach house as an alternative to the nuclear family or as a *family of choice*, there are clear examples of house members taking on the roles of mother, father, and baby of the family. *The Real World II* does provide several extended examples of the role of family of origin.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine how popular media, specifically in the form of *The Real World II*, can be used most effectively in the classroom to illustrate the basic concepts of interpersonal, group, and family communication. No attempt was made to quantify the number of instances of each communication concept, theory, or issue listed in Appendix A. While multiple examples of a particular concept allow for flexibility in curriculum design, the existence of even a

single example illustrates the usefulness of *The Real World II* in the communication classroom. Even though a quantitative analysis was not undertaken for this survey, the table designed for the curriculum guide and included here as Appendix C does reveal some interesting information. If one views the table as a very crude form of scatter-plot analysis, it becomes evident that the early episodes are best suited to the introduction of basic communication concepts while later episodes are better suited to a discussion of group methods and family communication. Intuitively, it follows that group and family dynamics take time to develop, suggesting that one would expect to find better examples of these concepts in the later episodes.

As noted previously, a systematic review of the entire series for the purpose of content analysis is an imposing task. In this study, the results are the work of a single researcher — the author. The nature of content analysis suggests that the results will be biased by the selection of the researcher. This problem was most evident in the attempt to classify scenes according to the criteria listed in Appendix A. In particular, it became an exercise in futility to try and distinguish certain illustrations as examples of one theory over another. For example, costs and rewards theory, social exchange theory, social learning theory, rules theory, and investment theory all attempt to explain the same or overlapping areas of the interpersonal communication process. Their manifestations look the same regardless of the theoretical approach one takes. Similarly, social penetration and uncertainty reduction seem so closely related as to make it difficult to distinguish examples of one from another, if indeed one even believes there is a difference. Finally, because *The Real World II* group represents a non-nuclear family, is one to classify certain stages of development as family stages or just individual and group relationship stages? As a result, this analysis fails to do a very good job of making those distinctions. Additional analysis by others might help both to identify additional examples of communication concepts and clarify how they should be identified. The effect of these limitations is mitigated by the stated goal of this

study. When taken as an initial step in on-going research into how to most effectively use commercial media in the classroom, the limitations identified, while important to consider, do not lessen the value of the findings.

Additional research is on-going to determine the most effective ways of using *The Real World II* and similar programs in the communication classroom. A number of approaches are suggested. At the content analysis level, critical analysis by other researchers, either working alone or in groups, will likely identify additional examples of the concepts listed in Appendix A. The richness of examples and their applicability across a number of communication contexts suggests that one's research agenda will influence the analysis of the program content. For example, an instructor of group communication methods will be less concerned with issues of family communication and more interested in group dynamics; the interpersonal communication instructor is likely to seek examples of extended dyadic interaction.

Based on the existing literature, this study assumed a priori that the genre of programming represented by *The Real World* is particularly well suited to illustrating basic communication concepts. This assumption is being tested by the author through the use of focus groups. According to Joan Middendorf (personal communication, March 1, 1994), director of Indiana University's Teaching Resources Center, the main component in making media effective in the university classroom is its relevance to the issues in the lives of university students. *The Real World II* appears to do exactly this but it should be possible to verify this observation. While survey research provides one means of answering these questions, the use of focus groups has been found to be an effective and efficient way of gathering data on this type of research question (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956; Morgan, 1988, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus groups also provide a means of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of individual programs as teaching tools. The author's own work is based on a variety of group

techniques made possible by computer-based group support software (GSS). This relatively new research tool has been shown to overcome some of the problems traditionally associated with focus group methodology (Dennis, George, Jessup, Nunamaker, & Vogel, 1988; Gallupe, Bastianutti, & Cooper, 1991; Nunamaker, Applegate, & Konsynski, 1987) .

The availability of *The Real World II* as a teaching tool can be a blessing to the communication instructor. However unfortunate, the nature of contemporary media is change, suggesting that *The Real World II* and its predecessor and later editions will fade from popularity with time. The ultimate goal of this line of research is not to marry itself to a particular program or even necessarily a particular genre of programming, even though at this point in our culture certain genres seem to enjoy greater popularity than others.[12] Rather, the purpose of this research is to continue to refine the criteria for effective use of media in the communication classroom. Commercial television programming in particular offers a wide variety of examples from which to choose and which can be nicely integrated into the communication classroom.

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Appendix A

General Communication Concepts

Communication Climates

Communication Competence

Compliance Gaining Strategies

Conflict and Conflict Management

Conflict Spirals

Content and Relational Elements of Messages

Cultural Influences on Communication

Effective Listening

Emotions

Empathy

Facework/Impression Management

Gender Influences on Communicator Style

Listening Skills

Metacommunication

Nonverbal Communication

Power

Relationship Maintenance

Relational Prototypes

Relationship Stages

Self-concept

Self-disclosure

Self-monitoring

Symbolic Nature of Language

Transactional nature of communication

Family Issues

The Changing Family/Alternative Family Structures

Family Maintenance

Family of Origin

Family Roles

Family Stages

Family Stressors

Parent-Child Relationships

Power Alliances

Sibling Relationships

Prominent Theories

Attribution Theory

Cognitive Dissonance

Costs and Rewards

Equity Theory

Investment Theory

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Resources Theory

Rules Theory

Social Exchange Theory

Social Learning Theory

Social Penetration Theory

Systems Theory

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Appendix B

This appendix serves as a pointer to the curriculum guide which, due to length, is included under separate cover

Appendix C

This table is a reproduction of one included in the curriculum guide. It is intended as a guide in the selection of appropriate episodes to illustrate specific communication concepts. Note that only the most prominent concepts in each episode are reflected by this chart. For instance, excellent examples of nonverbal communication can be found in nearly every episode, but may not be the primary value of the episode.

	Episode																			
General Concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Climate				●																	
Competence																					
Compliance								●													
Conflict						●	●									●			●		
Culture	●																	●			
Emotive Language			●			●	●														
Empathy						●	●														
Facework		●	●								●										
Gender						●	●		●	●											
Initial Attraction	●	●																			
Listening								●													
Metacommunication				●		●	●														
Nonverbal	●					●	●														
Power																				●	
Relationship Stages	●		●	●							●										●
Self-concept	●									●				●						●	
Self-disclosure		●						●		●		●									
Self-monitoring	●							●				●									
Stereotypes	●	●	●											●							
Family Issues																					
Family Maintenance								●				●				●					
Family of Origin	●									●			●		●				●		
Family Roles		●			●								●		●						
Family Stages									●		●					●					●
Family Stressors										●			●								
Parent-Child Relations													●						●		
Power Alliances					●													●			
Theories																					
Attribution																		●			
Cognitive Dissonance															●						
Costs and Rewards				●																	
Rules		●										●						●			
Social Penetration		●						●		●		●				●					
Uncertainty Reduction	●	●						●				●				●					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Episode																				

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Endnotes

[1] The educator, who wishes to remain anonymous, now directs the State Board of Education's television programming production department for a large midwestern state.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to *The Real World* will refer to the collective works done under this title by producers Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray.

[3] Proctor and Adler (1991) offer a listing of widely available films categorized by topic. While this is very helpful, it has the somewhat undesirable side-effect of sacrificing appropriate teaching creativity in the selection of materials for the reliability and security of a quasi-officially sanctioned sample of appropriate media.

[4] Fitzpatrick (1991) established several criteria for an "appropriate" interaction. They are listed on page 217 of the original article.

[5] According to Leland (1992), *MTV* wanted to create and air a soap opera, but decided it was too expensive. Leland observes: "That's *really* the real world" (p. 85, italics in original).

[6] In 1983, Susan and Alan Raymond produced a 10 year retrospective on the experience for HBO titled *American Family Revisited.*

[7] It is also, for the most part, unavailable. The Raymonds retain ownership rights to the films and have allowed the series to be archived at a limited number of libraries (personal communication, January 17, 1994).

[8] Another example is the Fox network series *Cops*. Other programs such as *Rescue 911* also may be loosely considered part of the *reality program* genre, but usually rely on recreations of the original events.

[9] Students in an introductory undergraduate course in interpersonal communication were asked to rate their relative preference for *The Real World* segments during an anonymous evaluation of course elements. Other television programs included *WKRP in Cincinnati* and *Roseanne*. Feature films included *Ordinary People*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, and *When Harry Met Sally*.

[10] According to an information package provided by the Cable Alliance for Education, some local cable companies do make a limited amount of equipment available. C-SPAN, a programming service that is owned by a consortium of cable companies also makes a limited number of equipment grants available on a competitive basis.

[11] The examples listed here were culled from the February 1994 issue of *Cable In The Classroom Magazine* published by IDG Publications, Peterborough, NH.

[12] A pilot survey study by the author conducted during the Spring of 1994 showed that students in a basic interpersonal communication course identified *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Days Of Our Lives* as their two most favorite examples of interpersonal communication on television.

A Guide to

The Real World II

by

Jim Grubbs

A Guide to *The Real World II*

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Background Information

A Guide to *The Real World II*

What Is *The Real World II* ?

According to industry sources, MTV originally was interested in producing a soap opera targeted to their viewers. After considering the project, they determined that the expenses associated with producing a soap opera would be cost prohibitive. They elected to create *The Real World* — a video-vérité look at life among seven strangers. It is best summarized by the narration in the opening sequence:

> This is the true story of seven strangers, picked to live in a house and have their lives taped, to find out what happens, when people stop being polite, and start getting real. The Real World.

The Producers

The Real World is produced for MTV by Bunim-Murray Productions, 10 Universal Plaza, 33rd Floor, Universal City, CA 91608. Telephone (818) 505-7930. Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray are the executive producers. They are also the producers of *American Families* — a pilot program that aired on the Fox network on August 16, 1991. (This program should not be confused with the original PBS production of *An American Family* — a series to which *The Real World* is often compared.)

More recently, Bunim-Murray produced a pilot for NBC television titled *Friends and Lovers* that aired March 6, 1994. The program has the look and feel of *The Real World* but is designed for somewhat older demographics.

Selection of the Participants

The seven original members of *The Real World II* family were selected by the producers. An open casting call was advertised on MTV and in several entertainment industry publications. It is unclear exactly how many responses were received, but it is known that the number of respondents numbered in the thousands. The two replacement members of the house were also selected from this pool. In the case of David's replacement, the remaining six house members were allowed to choose from among three potential candidates that were pre-selected by the producers.

The Setting

The seven members of *The Real World II* were housed in a home right off the beach in Venice, California. There were actually nine participants; two of the original group left the house during the production and were replaced. In addition to the household members, one should keep in mind that a number of television production personnel were almost constantly in the house. While they did not live there, they staffed a control room and operated cameras virtually around the clock.

Time Frame

The Real World II was shot during the first six months of 1993 and started airing later that year.

Format of Program

The program ran for 21 episodes plus an introductory episode that consisted of a reunion of the original *The Real World I* house members. For the purposes of this guide, the introductory episode is labelled *zero* and is not included in the curriculum. The rest of the episodes are labelled one to twenty-one in the order that they originally aired on MTV.

The episodes premiered, one per week, on Thursday nights during prime-time hours on MTV. The new episode was generally preceded by a repeat of the previous week's episode. The new episode was then repeated throughout the weekend.

As originally aired, each episode is 30 minutes long with two breaks for commercials. The actual program material runs about 22 minutes per episode and is broken into three roughly equal length segments by two commercial breaks. Each episode begins with a recap of the previous week's show and concludes with a preview of the next episode. In some of the later episodes, the recap is dropped in favor of simply previewing events in the episode that follows. Some episodes include short bits of new and often unrelated material after the preview.

Copyright Information

The copyright holder for *The Real World* is MTV Networks, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Classroom use of copyrighted material is subject to the provisions of Title 17, Section 110(1) of the Copyright Act. In order to avoid copyright infringement, legal counsel should be consulted before using *The Real World II* in your classroom.

Participants

Biographical data on the participants in *The Real World II* are based on information contained in the show itself and, in some cases, press accounts and reviews of the show. Last names have been spelled phonetically when it was not possible to confirm the correct spelling.

Tami Akbar

Tami worked for the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Services Center — HIV Healthcare Clinic. Late in the series she resigns from this position citing "burnout" and her desire to concentrate on her career as a singer and performer in her group "Reality." Tami describes herself as having been physically abused and homeless during her senior year in high school.

Beth Anthony

Beth A. or B.A. as she is referred to in the house, joined the group as a replacement for Irene. She was selected by the producers. She is from Oregon and works as a movie production assistant in craft services as a scenic painter. Beth is a lesbian and a recovering alcoholic.

Aaron Bailey

Aaron graduated from El Dorado High School in Orange County, California, where he was elected student body president and member of the National Honor Society. At the time of his participation in *The Real World*, Aaron was an economics major at UCLA and an active member of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity. He graduated with a degree in economics in June 1993 and planned to become a certified public accountant. His graduation occurred on the very last day of filming for the series and is included as part of the final episode. Aaron is also known as "Mr. August 1992" for his appearance in a pin-up calendar titled "The Men of Westwood." In *The Real World*, Aaron becomes the de facto "dad" of the group.

Irene Bererra-Kearns

Irene is the oldest participant in the show. She works as a deputy marshal. When the series began, she was engaged to Timothy Kearns. Their wedding occurs during the series. Irene's departure from the house and her subsequent replacement by Beth Anthony were known and planned for from the beginning of the series. During her stay at the house, Irene took on the role as "mom" to the group.

Jon Brennan

Jon, who was 18 at the time the series began, is the "baby" of the family. He lives in Owensboro, Kentucky, drives a red pick-up truck with license plates KUNTRY, and aspires to be a country singer. He has a brother named Buck and a sister who both still live with his parents. Jon and his family are active in church activities. Jon attended Belmont University in Nashville for one semester just prior to the taping of *The Real World*.

David Edwards

David is a stand-up comedian who joined the house after living in Washington, D.C. His birthday is April 23. After leaving *The Real World*, David appeared semi-regularly on the Fox television series *In Living Color*. He also tours comedy clubs and has appeared on a number of television stand-up comedy shows. Most recently he had a small role in the *House Party* movies.

Dominic Griffin

Dom, as he is usually referred to by his housemates, left his home in Dublin, Ireland at age 17. Dom is named for his father. He writes entertainment reports (especially reviews of new television shows) for several publications including *Daily Variety*. One of his regular columns is titled "Radio Active." As a result of his appearance on *The Real World*, Dom is now represented by the William Morris Agency.

Glen Naessens

Glen was selected from among three candidates when David was asked by the rest of the house members to leave. Glen is the eighth of nine children. His alternative band, "Perch," consists of members from his hometown, Philadelphia. Glen is Catholic and says his goals are to do music and videos. At the time he was selected to join *The Real World* he was working in a music store and playing in his band part-time.

Beth Stolarczyk

Beth S. came to California from Ohio. Her mother is the "Polish Voice of Cleveland" with regular shows on WERE and WCPN Radio, both in Cleveland; her father is deceased. Beth appears to have worked in several entertainment field related jobs during the series. Early in the series she identifies herself as a production assistant, but is later seen working at *The Casting Group*. Beth aspires to be an actress and is represented by *Media Artists Group*. Beth loves her cat — a source of great consternation for the household. Her friends describe her as a "drama queen" apparently for the intense way she reacts to even the slightest problem.

Episode Guide

How This Guide Is Arranged

A separate sheet containing a synopsis for each episode is provided. The synopsis is further divided into the three segments created by the two commercial breaks. Because the number of commercials varies with each showing, it is not possible to provide an exact notation of each scene's position within the show, but they are listed in order of actual appearance within each segment. An important feature of the synopsis is a block that summarizes the communication concepts *best* illustrated by a particular episode. Illustrations of many concepts can be found in each episode, but those appearing in the block have been identified as strongly represented by this particular episode.

A note about the episode titles: Titles were chosen to reflect the general theme of the show and to provide an easy way to refer to each episode in a more personal way than episode numbers alone will allow. They are not "official" in any sense and appear nowhere except this guide.

A more complete listing is provided in the section *Communication Concepts Illustrated.* A brief discussion of the episode's strong points, from a communication perspective, are presented. Several discussion questions are included, as well as additional space for your notes about the episode.

A table is provided at the end of this manual that can serve as a guide to episode selection.

In addition to the discussion questions that appear along with the episode summaries, the final section of this guide includes a number of suggested activities based on *The Real World II.*

Recommendations

It is *not* necessary to use the entire series in order for it to be effective. While most of the episodes may be used in any order, either singly or in combination with others, the experience is likely to be enhanced if a few guidelines are followed:

1. Episodes # 1 and # 2 should be shown first in order to introduce the participants in the show. Episode # 1 concentrates on Jon, Tami, and Dominic; the rest of the house is not introduced until Episode # 2.

2. If they are used, Episodes # 6 and # 7 should be shown together. Be forewarned that some students find these particular episodes intense. Episode # 4, while not required viewing for an understanding of the events that occur, does provide an additional frame of reference and is suggested viewing.

3. New house members are introduced in Episodes # 8 and # 12. For the most part, later episodes can be viewed without having seen these episodes, but a brief explanation of what has happened previously should be provided.

4. Obviously, interpersonal and family relationships grow and change with time. If you elect to use an episode out of sequence, students should have the opportunity to either view the earlier episodes or be provided with a synopsis of earlier events.

5. Note that some episodes deal with sensitive issues. Their appropriateness for use in your classroom should be determined on a case by case basis.

Meet The Real World

Episode 1

Cultural Influences
Family of Origin
Initial Attraction
Nonverbal
Relationship Stages
Self-concept
Self-monitoring
Stereotypes
Uncertainty Reduction

Segment # 1: The show begins with members of *The Real World I* commenting briefly on the next generation of *The Real World*; they offer their predictions for how things will work out for the new group. After the opening, we join Dominic as he prepares to meet Tami for the first time. He is picking her up at the airport. The two of them then drive in a motor home to Owensboro, Kentucky to pick up Jon at his family's home.

Segment # 2: We meet Jon and his family and see Jon perform at *Goldie's Opera House* in Owensboro where he is a local star. The following morning Dom, Tami, and Jon begin their cross-country journey to Venice, California. After Jon manages to get them lost several times, they arrive in Memphis, Tennessee, the home of Elvis and *Graceland*. While Dom has expressed his disdain for Kentucky and environs, he very much wants to make the *Graceland* pilgrimage.

Segment # 3: The final section of the show is centered largely on the interaction of the three roommates as they continue on the road in the motor home. The episode concludes with the three eating lunch and commenting about their new acquaintances and the role stereotyping plays in evaluating people.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

This episode is particularly good as a tool to illustrate the concepts of initial attraction, uncertainty reduction, and the early stages of interpersonal relationships. Each individual's self-concept comes into play and we see how self-monitoring is used in initial interactions. We witness the nature of the self-disclosure begin to change as the episode progresses. Cultural stereotyping is also a big issue throughout the episode.

This episode offers examples of the ways humor is sometimes used in an attempt to diffuse potentially volatile situations.

While we do not learn much about either Dom's or Tami's families, we do get an introduction to Jon's family, the Brennans. In combination with material from later episodes, we find good illustrators of the relationships in Jon's family of origin. Later episodes give insight into both Dom and Tami's families of origin as well that of Beth S.

This episode, as well as all of the episodes in the series, are rich in examples of nonverbal communication.

The group and dyadic communication in this episode provide good examples of interpersonal concepts. The producers of *The Real World II* also employed another technique that gives us insight into the self-concept of each member of the household. In an attempt to capture the thoughts behind the interactions, the series is peppered with scenes that involve just a single participant and the camera.

Discussion Questions

How would you feel about being a member of *The Real World* household?

If Dom and Tami showed up at your mom and dad's front door, how would your parents react?

Based only on the information provided by viewing this episode, what is your initial impression of Jon, Tami, and Dom?

Which person do you find the most likeable? With whom do you most identify?

Notes

California or Bust!

Episode 2

Facework
Family Roles
Initial Attraction
Rules Theory
Self-disclosure
Social Penetration
Stereotypes
Uncertainty Reduction

Segment # 1: As their trek across the Southwest continues, Dom, Tami, and Jon all experience a little culture shock when they are served rattlesnake and "cow fries" as appetizers. While in Taos, New Mexico, Dom arranges for a ski trip. Later he meets two women and agrees to take them to Sedona, Arizona. Whereas Dom consulted with the others before scheduling the ski trip, he made the commitment to the Sedona detour without their knowledge. A heated discussion follows and the trip to Sedona is squelched before it begins. The three housemates continue to learn about each other over lunch where the conversation turns to the Bible and religion in general. By the end of the first segment, Tami has expressed her disgust with the entire trip.

Segment # 2: We begin to see Jon as a real "fish out of water" when the three acquaintances arrive in Las Vegas, Nevada. On the way out of town headed for California, Dom brings up the subject of Jon's fan club. A number of comments are exchanged, particularly between Jon and Tami, and the group's second heated conflict begins and is never really resolved.

Jon, Tami, and Dom arrive at the house before the others. But, in a short time, we meet in order, Aaron, David, Beth S., and finally Irene.

Segment # 3: The *confessional* room is explained. The producers have created a small, intimate room in the house with a camera where each individual can go to *let off steam* — but there is a catch. Each participant is required to make at least one trip to the confessional each week. Everything is taped and is subject to being aired. So the confessional, while an interesting tool for the producers and the audience, is hardly private in the traditional sense of the word. It is the only room in the house with a lock on the door.

A number of events occur during this segment. The three women are all located in one room, but it is quite large — much larger than the total space of the two rooms allocated for the four men. The selection process of beds, closet space, and roommates (for the men) provides interesting interactions. At the end of the episode, the entire household heads out for a meal where Dom tells Aaron about Jon and the trip. We get our first glimpse of Aaron as *mediator*. Afterwards, Tami takes Dom and Jon aside and calls for a "clean slate."

Communication Concepts Illustrated

When Dom agrees to take the two women he meets to Sedona, we see a good interaction between Dom, Tami, and Jon about "setting limits." Dom gets a basic lesson in rules theory as he finds out what his roommates expect from him. Through communication, Dom realizes his error in not consulting the others and takes responsibility for correcting things.

The lunchtime discussion among the three about religion shows what can happen when self-disclosure approaches areas that are deeply rooted in one's values. The nonverbal behaviors exhibited as Tami reveals her affiliation with the Muslim religion, and the interaction between Jon and Dom nonverbally as they discuss the Bible are particularly rich. Additionally, the entire episode continues to underscore the role that stereotyping plays in relationships.

Episode 2 continues to illustrate the concepts involved in initial attraction and uncertainty reduction. Additionally, the selection of roommates and personal spaces sets the stage for a number of liaisons and conflicts that will arise later in the show.

The scene where Tami calls for a truce and emphasizes the need for Jon, Dom, and herself to not inflict their opinions of each other on the remaining members of the house, illustrates a number of principles involved in conflict management and resolution. It also serves as an example of how Dom, Tami, and Jon use facework in order to give the project a better chance for success.

Even at this early stage in the series we begin to see each of the members assume their role in the family. From later episodes we learn that Aaron's attempt at mediation fits his perceived role as "father." Jon sometimes acts, and is usually treated, as, "the baby of the family." Irene's role as "mother" develops later. Dom might be thought of as the somewhat strange, but likeable "uncle" or older brother.

Discussion Questions

What are the rules in your family?

What subjects do you find particularly difficult to discuss with others, especially after just meeting them?

Have you ever been far away from home on your own? How did that make you feel?

Do you usually let others see the *real* you? If not, when do you tend to put on a *different face*?

Do you think the confessional room provides a good outlet for the members of the house to express their true feelings? Remember that anything that is said in the confessional has the potential to end up on national television.

What effect do you think the selection of roommates and distribution of house space will have on the long term relationships among the house members?

Notes

The Party

Episode 3

Emotive Language
Facework
Relationship Stages
Stereotypes

Segment # 1: Irene discusses her career as a policewoman and makes her obligations to her career clear; she will not tolerate any illegal activity in the house. David and Jon, who have ended up as roommates, clash over a comment Jon makes when David's beeper goes off. In *The Real World I*, a joke is made about one of the house members being a drug dealer because he has a beeper. Jon has seen the episode and that is his frame of reference when he makes the comment, but David takes it as a racial slur.

Beth S. has brought her cat with her to live in the house. Dom, who has a dog he had hoped to keep at the house with him, is perturbed because Beth did not ask anyone if it would be o.k. to bring the cat; she just assumed that it would be acceptable to the others. Beth's cat becomes a running joke throughout the entire series. In fact, it can be heard in the opening credits each week.

Segment # 2: Beth S. has invited everyone in the house to a Beverly Hills party. The only problem is that Beth herself was not really invited. She learned of the party through a friend who was invited but didn't end up going. The group, minus Tami, (her absence is not explained) decides to go. David, Dom and Aaron ride in one car, while Jon, Irene, and Beth take a second car. In time, the hostess of the party realizes that they are gatecrashers and asks them to leave. Dom in particular is upset that Beth did not fully disclose the situation before they went. Apparently at some point, David is also perceived as a thief by some of the guests and that ultimately leads to an additional conflict between he and Jon.

Segment # 3: We get confirmation of both Irene's and Jon's roles in the house. There's an amusing scene between the two as Irene cleans her gun and the two of them start singing "Bad Boys" — the theme from the television series *Cops*. Irene also discusses her relationship with her fiancee, Tim.

Jon and David continue to search for common ground and come close in their discussion about music. Nevertheless, Jon's earlier request to hang a Confederate flag on the wall, and David's wearing of a Malcolm X shirt, provoke the two of them to additional verbal conflict. The segment ends with a scene showing Jon being physically attacked by David with Aaron intervening.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The role of stereotyping in interpersonal relationships continues to be a dominant theme, especially in the relationship between David and Jon. We see further indications of the polarization in house members.

Irene's discussion about her relationship with her fiancee also serves as a good catalyst for a discussion about relationship stages. The conversations between Irene and Jon also suggest that some type of strong bond is forming between the two.

When the house members are revealed as gatecrashers at the Beverly Hills Party, Dom uses facework with the hostess to try and put the best slant on things. Beth S., in practicing some facework of her own, may have extended the invitation in the hopes that she would be perceived as a likeable person

The physical violence that David displays illustrates the potentially harmful effects of highly emotive language and other communication symbols (such as a Confederate flag or Malcolm X shirt). It offers an opportunity to discuss where meaning comes from.

Discussion Questions

What kind of relationship do you think is developing between Jon and Irene? What indications are there that they have begun to move up the ladder of relationship stages?

How might David and Jon have communicated more effectively to avoid or reduce the conflict that resulted from their words and symbolic gestures?

How do you interpret Beth S.'s behavior in telling the group about the party? Was Dom's anger justified?

What do you do when someone does something that affects your life without consulting with you about it first? Was it o.k. for Beth S. to bring her cat without asking the others first?

What words or symbols "trigger" strong emotions in you?

Notes

I'm Gonna Get Ya Tami

Episode 4

Communication Climate
Costs and Rewards
Metacommunication
Relationship Stages

Segment # 1: In individual interviews, David and Tami discuss their attraction to each other. Beth S. predicts an intimate relationship for the two of them in two weeks time, while Beth S. and Irene speculate on David and Tami's upcoming dinner date. In the meantime, David has two male visitors from Chicago. An afternoon shopping excursion that had been intended as an opportunity for David, Jon, and Tami to get to know each other better becomes a forum for David and his buddies to wander up and down Melrose Avenue trying to impress women. Tami, who was not amused by all of this, cancels the dinner date. David is hurt and doesn't see his actions as sufficient reason for Tami to cancel. At the end of the segment, Tami predicts that she and David will remain friends, but nothing more.

Segment # 2: Tami reveals that she has previously appeared on the game show *Studs* and has been asked to make a second appearance. David is subjected to watching Tami go out with the men who will be on *Studs* with her. (In violation of the show's rules, Tami has also hatched a plot to influence the outcome of the show to ensure that she will win.) Shortly after Tami leaves the house with one of her dates, Irene arranges for the rest of the group to go bowling. David is on the phone at the time and after apparently ignoring several requests for him to join the rest of the group, ends up not realizing they have already left. When he does arrive later at the bowling alley, Tami is there with her date and David makes a scene based on his assumption that he wasn't invited along with the rest of the group. Irene tries to intervene and finally ends up telling David to leave. When he doesn't, Irene leaves. The result is a confrontation between David and Dom in the parking lot that comes close to turning physically violent.

Segment # 3: David comments on what happened. Irene has left the house for the night. Later, Irene, speaking in the confessional, is quite upset about the incident. Aaron goes into "father knows best mode" and insists that the problem has to be confronted directly. The decision is made to discuss the matter at the regularly scheduled Tuesday night "house meeting." Aaron continues to play the role of leader. Eventually, David agrees to try to be a better house member and others agree on concessions to him. In individual appearances, other house members express their concerns about David.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

There are two dominant themes in this episode: the fragility of an emerging relationship, and the importance of the communication climate. We get first-hand information about what Tami and David find attractive in each other as well as what limitations they see for their relationship both initially and after it becomes clear that things aren't going to work out. We also have a good example of how behaviors can be interpreted differently by each of the parties even in an intimate relationship. Perhaps the most important concept illustrated by this particular episode involves the notion of communication climate. There are a number of misunderstandings, and those misunderstandings can be largely explained by the atmosphere in which the communication occurred. Particularly as it relates to the members of the house other than Tami, David has developed a reputation for being combative and volatile. In turn, others in the house have become sensitized to his behavior and react defensively sometimes when it isn't called for.

The house meeting does a particularly good job of illustrating the problems of an uncomfortable communication climate. David appears to be correct when he accuses the others of "ganging up" on him at the house meeting. There's quite a lot of "you" language directed at him. Even some of the more general references are thinly veiled "you" language directed at David. What he fails to realize is his part in creating and perpetuating the negative climate. The house meeting may be particularly useful as a tool for illustrating the dynamics present in a group of roommates or a family. It also serves as an example of metacommunication, as the house members not only discuss the problems they are having but also discuss the ways in which they communicate about those problems.

The notion of costs and rewards in interpersonal relationship suggests that David's behavior on Melrose Avenue, while it had personal rewards for him at the time, later had a cost in his relationship with Tami.

Discussion Questions

If you were in Tami's shoes, how would you react to David's activities with his friends?

What do you think caused David to act the way he did at the bowling alley?

What roles do you see each of house members playing? Is there a "father" for example?

While Tami and Jon got off to a bad start, what do you think happened that now allows them to go shopping and exploring together as friends? Or, do you really think they have become friends?

Does talking about communication with your friends help you to resolve problems in your life?

What was the communication climate like in the house? Did this contribute to the problems with David? What could be done to make the climate better?

Notes

The Odd Couple

Episode 5

Family Roles
Power Alliances

Segment # 1: Tami manages to out fox herself and ends up losing on *Studs*. It is interesting to note that even though she and Jon began the series at each other's throats, and Jon feels that her appearance on *Studs* is somewhat silly, Jon is the only house member in the audience when the show is taped.

For the remainder of this episode, the main focus is on the developing relationship between Aaron and Dom, with everyone sharing their thoughts individually about the two. Several of the house members note that the relationship between the two largely excludes the rest of the house members. Aaron also makes an appearance at his old high school. A seemingly innocent event occurs when Dom comes home somewhat drunk and falls asleep in his bed dressed in some outlandish boxer shorts. Beth discovers his condition and escorts several of the other house members in to look. Everyone, including Dom, seems to think this is pretty funny at the time. The event will later come back to haunt them all, especially Beth S.

Segment # 2: Beth S. has auditioned for a part in the television version of *A League of Our Own* and we learn that she has two male friends scheduled to come to visit the same weekend. She describes herself as a "drama queen" when the pressures begin to build. Aaron and Dom head for the ski slopes, while Jon likens his situation to the "new fish" in the tank. It's worth noting that the animation used at the end of the credits is a goldfish swimming around in a bowl — the symbolism seeming quite appropriate if a bit obvious.

Aaron, while insisting "I'm not Jon's Dad," acts exactly as if he is. He fails to understand Jon's reluctance to get out into the world and explore and meet other people. Irene, taking the role as "mom," defends Jon and specifically comments that she has tired of Aaron's put downs of Jon.

Segment # 3: Irene and her fiancee Tim have decided to take Jon with them on their weekend visit to Irene's home town. "Jon calls me mom," Irene says in a personal interview. Back at the house, Dom and Aaron are plotting (good naturedly) against Jon, who absolutely loves his Kool Aid! They dump several extra cups of sugar into his pitcher. Jon takes his turn in the confessional to discuss his hopes and dreams for the future. In the final scenes, Irene prods Jon into going with her to a place called the *Western Connection*. Although Jon is underage, he is allowed to sing a number with the house band and ends up having a very good time.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The focus on Aaron and Dom offers an opportunity to view real life dyadic communication first hand. Even their discussion about Social Security reveals much about each of them as individuals and the closeness of their relationship. Their prank aimed at Jon further illustrates the bond they enjoy as well as illustrating the ways in which that bond serves to separate them from others in the house. There are similar opportunities to observe Jon and Irene's communication in this episode.

From a group or family perspective, the theme of this episode lends itself to a discussion of the ways in which coalitions form and how they affect the overall communication climate and group dynamics of roommates and families.

Discussion Questions

Why do you think Dom and Aaron seem to get along so well? What are the positive and negative effects of their friendship on the group as a whole?

Why do Jon and Irene seem to get along so well?

What does Irene do that makes Jon and the others in the group think of her as *mom*?

When someone plays a practical joke on you, how do you react?

If Beth S. is "a drama queen" and Jon is "a fish out of water," what phrase or metaphor would you use to describe yourself?

Why do you think Jon is reluctant to go out of the house either to get a job or just to explore the neighborhood?

Notes

No Means No!

Episode 6

Conflict Management
Emotive Language
Empathy
Gender Influences
Metacommunication
Nonverbal

NOTE: This episode and the next one should be considered as a unit. The issues are important and particularly relevant to a discussion of the role of communication in conflict. Episode #4, while not required in order to understand the events that occur here, is helpful in providing background information for class discussion of these events.

Segment # 1: The episode begins with Jon and others discussing the tension in the house — largely as a result of David's volatile nature and unwillingness to cooperate with others in the house. The men in the house have all gathered in the kitchen and are joking about taking over the women's room when Irene moves out to get married. What they don't know is that Tami and Irene are watching them on a television monitor upstairs and can see and hear everything they are saying. Tami doesn't find it funny and comes down to confront the men. After the men have upset Tami, David and the others decide to go to the women's room; David wants to apologize to Tami. She is already in bed and is dressed in nothing but her underwear. At some point, David, apparently in a playful mood, drags Tami from her bed. Beth S. joins in to "protect" Tami, but as the scene unfolds, everyone appears to be laughing and taking the incident in the same playful mood David later claims was his intention. David is seen dragging Tami and Beth around in the hallway. Tami finally escapes to the bathroom where, upon reflection, she becomes very upset with David's behavior. When she emerges from the bathroom, Tami explodes. As the segment ends, in a retrospective interview, Irene attempts to explain the confusion.

Segment # 2: David blames Beth for escalating the problem and provoking Tami into believing David's intentions were more malicious than he intended them. Conversely, Beth sees herself as the only one who came to Tami's aid while the rest of the house either looked on or stayed in their own rooms. There are allegations of sexual battery and the word rape is used.

Segment # 3: We hear the reactions of each of the house members as they consider the incident the morning after. The entire group, minus David, holds an ad hoc meeting. The women want David out and they do not wish to have any further communication with him. Aaron in particular thinks such an action would be too harsh under the circumstances. Everyone discusses the previous house meeting (Episode # 4) and agrees that David has not made any changes for the better. While all of this is going on, David speaks his mind to the camera. He keeps trying to analyze the situation to figure out what happened and what he did wrong.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

Communication climate and conflict management dominate this episode. The notion of a conflict spiral is clearly illustrated as a joke about taking over the women's room leads to accusations of rape. The use of "rape" also illustrates quite strongly the emotional content that is attached to some words.

Beth S.'s strong reaction to David's behavior indicates that she is very empathetic about Tami's reaction. The difference in the ways the women and men perceive the events and the ways in which they talk about those events, illustrates the role gender can play in communication.

The nonverbal communication in this episode is particularly powerful and revealing. The discussions that follow about the events are further examples of metacommunication.

Discussion Questions

Describe what you saw happen in the women's bedroom when David and the others came in. Try and be as objective and detailed as possible.

What emotions do you feçl when you hear the word *rape*?

Using examples from this episode, explain what it means to empathize with someone?

What previous events in the house may have influenced the way in which David's actions were interpreted by the others?

If you had been an observer durnng the incident, what, if any, action would you have taken? Would you have tried to stop it? Would you laugh? Would you quietly observe?

Notes

Paying The Price

Episode 7

Conflict Management
Emotive Language
Empathy
Gender Influences
Metacommunication
Nonverbal

NOTE: This episode and the previous one should be considered as a unit. The issues are important and particularly relevant to a discussion of the role of communication in conflict. Episode #4, while not required in order to understand the events that occur here, is helpful in providing background information for class discussion of these events.

Segment # 1: David is trying to get Tami and/or Beth to talk to him on an individual basis about the events in the previous episode. He mentions that he has also asked to speak to them without the cameras present, but that request was denied. Finally, the women agree to meet with David en masse. He apologizes, but feels that his actions were similar to Beth's viewing Dom's underwear (Episode # 5). David is asked by all of the women to leave the house. David accuses Beth S. of deliberately escalating the situation and demands that if he must leave the house, she must as well for her own actions.

Segment # 2: Aaron is once again acting as mediator or father figure by trying to force Beth S. to talk to David about the situation. Dom seems to agree that Beth should talk to David, but she still refuses. Aaron expresses concern for David's career; the men aren't quite sure what to do. Irene, speaking to the camera, makes her obligations as a law enforcement officer clear. We see Aaron continuing to try to reason and gather the facts of the case. David enters the women's room uninvited; Dom attempts to keep David calm while Beth defends her own actions. At the height of the confrontation, Irene orders David out of the house.

Segment # 3: David makes his final visit to the confessional. The terms of the contract with the producers require that anyone who leaves the house permanently must explain why they are doing so on camera. David apologizes to everyone except Beth S. He makes it clear that he feels she is responsible for the problem. We see Irene, in tears, talking to her mother on the telephone. After David puts his key to the house on the table and leaves, we see Aaron and Jon in the kitchen discussing the decision that has been made. Aaron appears to have remained calm and uses words like "evaluating" and "quantifying" — something Jon finds amusing and/or somewhat odd. We hear Tami's final thoughts in the confessional and David, speaking to the camera after the fact, summarizes what he learned from the experience. We also learn that David has already been booked in a number of comedy clubs and that there appears to be no harm done to his career. At the end, Beth S., Tami, and Irene have come closer together as friends. With this drama behind them, Beth S. sees this as "a new beginning" for the house.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The resolution of the conflict from Episode # 6 comes in the form of rather abrupt termination. The nonverbals in this episode are particularly strong. Note David's vocalics as he tries to understand the situation. There are a number of illustrations of dyadic self-disclosure — something that is a bit rare in the earlier episodes.

A number of conflict styles are illustrated. Perhaps the most striking is Aaron's; Jon clearly finds it inappropriate that Aaron seems to be so detached and unemotional about the issue. There are illustrations of how communication between even the best of friends can "cool" under stress. At the same time, there are examples of how individuals often bond to weather a crisis. The discussion of the word "rape" is an excellent example of the emotive nature of words.

Each of the house members discusses their view of the events. While the other two women clearly empathize with Tami, the men are less sure of where their primary loyalties lie. The men seem to empathize with both David and Tami to some degree. Whether this is the result of gender differences makes a good topic for classroom discussion.

Several of the house members reflect on how communication, or lack of it, may have contributed to the crisis offering some good examples of metacommunication. The use of the word "rape" continues to be a central issue as each person tries to interpret the events.

Discussion Questions

Does David have the right to talk to the women individually?

Putting aside for the moment his contractual obligations to the producers of the show, did David have the right to speak to the women off-camera?

How did each of the house members arrive at her or his interpretation of the events? Were any of them influenced by the opinions of others?

What nonverbal communication, especially leakage cues, are present when David discusses the incident?

Do you think that gender difference alone is the main factor in the different interpretations of the events by the men and women?

Should David have been asked to leave? If not, what, if any, action should have been taken?

To what extent did David's previous actions contribute to the conflict?

Would you want to live in the house with David after this incident? Why or why not?

Notes

The Roommate Behind Door # 3

Episode 8

Compliance Gaining
Family Maintenance
Listening Skills
Self-disclosure
Self-monitoring
Social Penetration
Uncertainty Reduction

Segment # 1: The house members are excited because this is the day that they pick a new roommate to replace David. Aaron has appointed himself in charge of the process and several of the other house members comment on his actions. They interview three possible replacements. The first is Ed, an athlete who runs in track events. He's relatively quiet but likeable enough. The second interviewee is Kevin, 26. Kevin works at a shelter for homeless children and is a bit older than the rest of the house members. For the most part, he appears very serious and perhaps somewhat intense. Kevin asks the group, "If you could change just one thing you've done, what would it be?" Everyone is uneasy with the question, but the producers supply us with some flash-backs as suggestions for what each might regret. Their collective answer to him is, "We've had some personality conflicts."

Segment # 2: Beth S. and others discuss how they tried to word their questions to find out what they wanted to know. Specifically, the women apparently thought Kevin might be gay, but didn't want to pose that question directly. Aaron continues to try and organize things, making suggestions on what they should do before proceeding with the final interview. Glen arrives and answers their questions and asks a few of his own. His answers are filled with humor. They explain the decision process to him and tell him to expect a call with their decision later that night.

Segment # 3: While the producers have left the decision up to the house members, they have also stipulated that the decision must be made that evening — no delays will be allowed. In the last segment we learn that the vote is for Glen, but we do not learn the margin. After some discussion about who is going to call the interviewees, Aaron makes all three calls. He jokes with Glen a bit to make him think he has not been picked. After Glen arrives back at the house, Jon attempts to bond with him by talking to him about Aaron's behavior and then by inviting him to play a little one-on-one basketball. Two days later, Glen, Dom, and Aaron go to a concert. On the way home in the car, Dom takes offense to what he considers lack of appropriate listening behavior on Glen's part. Aaron observes that "here we go again."

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The producers of *The Real World II* used David's removal from the house as an opportunity to conduct a little on camera experiment. The result is an episode that is rich in examples of the uses of uncertainty reduction and initial attraction. The house members also appear on their best behavior, much as someone going on a first date might be. While the house members seem to resent Aaron's taking charge, this episode also illustrates their reluctance to perform uncomfortable tasks, being more than happy to let Aaron do the calling.

Aaron's approach to the interviews illustrates the ways in which he attempts to use compliance gaining strategies to have his own methods adopted for the process. The entire group has suddenly become responsible for family maintenance; because they must choose the new person, they will not be able to blame the producers for either a good or bad decision.

The interviewees and the existing house members are both put in a position of forced self-disclosure. We also see examples of the concepts of breadth and depth in social penetration theory terms. These scenes can be used to illustrate what effect there is on self-monitoring under these conditions.

The final scenes with Dom and Glen are an excellent example of listening behavior. They also illustrate how the same behaviors can be interpreted in a number of ways. Dom sees Glen as disinterested; Glen sees himself as exhibiting good listening behavior; the viewer is likely to side with Glen, but may also see that Dom appears and acts inebriated.

Discussion Questions

Do you communicate differently during an interview than you do when talking to a group of people you know? What, if anything, do you do differently?

When you want others to agree with your recommendations, what do you do to try and make them do things your way?

Do you think it's easier to really listen to someone: when you first meet, or later, after you get to know them?

When you want to know something about someone, but you consider it poor taste to ask, or you are embarrassed to ask, how do you attempt to get the information?

Which new roommate would you have chosen? Are there one or more of the candidates you would have definitely voted against?

Do you think Glen will fit in well with the group? Why or why not?

Notes

Teamwork

Episode 9

Family Stages
Gender Influences

Segment #1: All the members of the house have been invited to go on an Outward Bound experience at Joshua Tree National Forest. One of their guides, Cheryl, comes to the house to discuss the trip with them. The whole group had assumed their guide would be a man and are a bit surprised when Cheryl arrives.

After arriving at Joshua Tree, they meet up with Cheryl and the other instructor and guide, Steve. Glen is suffering from the flu and really not feeling well. They begin hiking, but find that Cheryl has managed to get them lost. There is a rather serious confrontation between the group and their guides. Jon notes that "it's like brothers and sisters" in that they may fight among themselves, but when an outsider is threatening their safety, they all stick together.

Segment # 2: Having finally reached their destination, the group sets up camp. At three in the morning, it pours rain and forces the entire group into two small tents. Everyone is upset except Jon, who seems to view this as his moment to shine. He comments that these "city folk" just have no idea of how to deal with nature. In a typical Outward Bound exercise designed to teach trust, Beth S. is lowered down the face of a mountain in a simulated rescue. Her life literally depends on the others.

Segment # 3: The simulated rescue is completed successfully, with the result being that the group is much happier. As they begin to try mountain climbing, Tami, in an apparent slip of the tongue, announces that she is pregnant. She does this to try and get out of doing the climbing. Shortly afterwards, Tami explodes at Aaron for no apparent reason. This episode ends with the awarding of Outward Bound pins to each of the house members. The ceremony is designed to further the bonds among the "team" and offers the chance for some self-disclosure.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The initial meeting between the group and Cheryl from Outward bound provides illustrations of the differences in male and female communication styles. There are several illustrations of bonding and the role communication plays in accomplishing goals. From a family perspective, the Outward Bound experience seems to best be expressed by Jon's comment about brothers and sisters.

Discussion Questions

What would have happened if the group had gone on this Outward Bound excursion shortly after they met each other?

Do you think the Outward Bound guide really got them lost, or was that a "set-up" as part of the experience?

What sort of family relationships do you see in this episode? How do the members of the house view each other?

Is there anything about the Outward Bound experience that you think changes the power relationships in the group — not necessarily in a permanent way, but at least during the trip?

What is your reaction to the ceremony at the end of the Outward Bound experience where the pins are awarded? Who would you have given your pin to and why? What would you have done if the person you selected had already been given a pin by someone else?

Notes

Tami's Pregnancy

Episode 10

Family of Origin
Family Stressors
Gender Influences
Self-concept
Self-disclosure
Social Penetration

Segment # 1: In an announcement to the whole group assembled in the living room, Tami officially acknowledges that she is pregnant and that she has decided to terminate the pregnancy. The next few minutes are filled with self-disclosure, as the house members express their own feelings on abortion. We are introduced to Tami's mother who gave birth to Tami when she was 15 1/2 years of age. Tami notes that they are more like sisters than mother and daughter.

Segment # 2: Aaron does volunteer work at the AIDS center where Tami is employed. Aaron and Jon go to the airport to pick up Aaron's girlfriend from San Francisco, Erin. In light of Tami's pregnancy, Erin's arrival seems to spark further conversation among the house members about sex and relationships in general.

Segment # 3: Tami's mother reveals that during Tami's senior year in high school they were homeless and lived in an automobile. Tami and her mother go to the clinic. Later, in the confessional, Tami says she is experiencing a great deal of pain and wonders if she is being punished for her decision. Her mother notes that legalized abortions were not available until April 1971 — just a few months after Tami was born.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

This relatively short synopsis should not be interpreted to mean the episode is less useful than others. The issues are just more clearly delineated in such a way that a shorter account tells the story. This episode is an excellent example of how communication behaviors change when the level of self-disclosure goes to the core of one's values. The house members have discussed a number of issues — many of which have seemed relatively intimate. Tami's pregnancy, her abortion, and issues of "safe sex" force everyone to consider their core values and how they wish to share or not share them with others. Tami's relationship with her mother reveals a great deal of information about families experiencing highly stressful situations.

While abortion is an important issue for both women and men, the talk among the group on this topic by the house members does provide an opportunity to discuss gender influences on communication. Each person's self-concept also comes into play as each one struggles to come to grips either with Tami's decision to have an abortion or the belief by some house members that abortion is wrong.

Discussion Questions

What happens when a family faces some sort of crisis? Do they become closer or farther apart?

How does one's past experiences contribute to his or her communication style?

What level and type of support does Tami's mom offer her? What is their relationship? What, if anything, could Tami's mom have done to help even more?

When you are confronted with a position different than your own, how do you react? Do you try and change the other person's mind and make them see it *your way*? If you do, how successful are you in doing so?

Why do you think Aaron chose this particular time to do volunteer work at the AIDS center where Tami works? Did his actions communicate anything to Tami or the rest of the group?

Notes

Calendar Man / Irene Gets Married

Episode 11

Facework
Family Stages
Relationship Stages

Segment # 1: Up to this point, Aaron has portrayed himself as a very responsible individual. To his ultimate dismay, Beth S. has learned that he appeared in a calendar "wearing only a surf board." Aaron has expressed his displeasure with Beth S. on numerous occasions and now she sees a chance for revenge. Simultaneously, Irene is preparing for her wedding day. In a tearful moment, we see her leave the house for the last time. Several of the house members go shopping for wedding presents. Even Aaron notes, "Irene is like a mom." Irene expresses her feeling for each of the house members by giving them each a different button that she feels best describes her roommates.

Segment # 2: Jon puts it bluntly: "Mom left us." In the meantime, the game is afoot as Beth S. goes to the copy shop and has 200 copies of Aaron's semi-nude calendar picture made, plus two poster size reproductions. When Aaron arrives at the house to find his picture plastered everywhere, he gets really angry, especially at Beth S.

Segment # 3: Irene's wedding prompts discussions among the other house members about their ideal mates. The group goes to the wedding and reception. Several of the house members comment on Jon's sadness and express the opinion that there was more than just friendship between he and Irene.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

What happens when the tables get turned? Beth's discovery of Aaron's calendar picture and her subsequent actions illustrate the point. This portion of the episode makes some strong statements about facework and the difference in our public and private selves. These concepts are further illustrated by Irene's choice of slogans on the buttons she gives everyone.

Irene's wedding provides a good example of "symbolic public gestures" associated with the bonding stage in interpersonal relationships and the changing family situation at *The Real World II* house. Sadly, it is also about termination of a sort, in that Jon seems to wish he were marrying Irene. Perhaps it is more about how families and family relationships change over time.

Discussion Questions

How do you feel when someone "pays you back" by playing a practical joke on you?

What message did the pictures of Aaron that Beth S. placed all around the house convey about their relationship?

Why do you think Aaron never told anyone in the house about posing for the calendar?

Why do you sometimes elect to not tell about something you've done in the past? Do you think Aaron shares your reasons?

What does Irene's departure mean for the rest of the members of the house?

Have you ever been in the situation Jon found himself in with Irene? Were you able to communicate your feelings about the situation to the other person?

What are the content and relational messages associated with a wedding? Do you believe they are an important part of an interpersonal relationship? Why or why not?

Notes

The New Roomie Arrives

Episode 12

Family Maintenance
Rules Theory
Self-disclosure
Self-monitoring
Social Penetration
Uncertainty Reduction

Segment # 1: The men decide to play a joke on Dom and arrange to make it appear that his truck has been towed away. Dom does not find this funny.

Everyone is anticipating the arrival of Irene's replacement. Since Irene's departure had been planned since the beginning, the selection of a replacement was done by the producers alone. Beth Anthony (Beth A.) arrives and learns the house rules.

Segment # 2: We get a rare opportunity in this series for some one-on-one, extended self-disclosure during this segment. First, Beth A. talks about her life with Jon. Later, Beth A. and Beth S. have a bedtime discussion. We hear from Aaron and Glen about what it means to have friends. Glen is anticipating the arrival of his band, "Perch," from Philadelphia. The house members are somewhat surprised when Beth A. arrives downstairs wearing a t-shirt that reads: "I'm not a lesbian, but my girlfriend is."

Segment # 3: Jon and Beth A. get the chance to learn more about each other on a shopping trip. Glen and Beth A. visit a gay and lesbian club. Glen helps "Perch" get settled in. It seems he has invited them to stay at the house temporarily. (Note: Episode # 16 deals with the problems this causes.)

Communication Concepts Illustrated

This is the second time that the dynamics of the group have been changed as the result of the departure and then arrival of a new person. As Beth A. learns the house rules, we see how communication codes extend far beyond language alone.

This episode works well in conjunction with Episode # 8 to illustrate initial attraction and the ways in which people monitor their behaviors around new people. While some of the other house members have taken some time to reveal their more intimate secrets, Beth A. seems to move more quickly.

There are very strong illustrations of dyadic communication in this episode, especially self-disclosure. Like many of the early episodes, it provides an opportunity to discuss stereotyping and cultural differences and their role in the communication process.

Discussion Questions

Based just on the information you learned during this episode, what effect do you think Beth A.'s arrival will have on the house?

Does Beth A. seem to disclose information about herself more or less quickly than Glen did when he arrived? If so, why do you think that is?

How do you react when you learn something about someone that catches you off-guard?

What does friendship mean to you? Do you communicate with your friends differently than you do with your family? Differently than in your more intimate relationships?

How would you react if one of your roommates invited his or her band to "spend a few weeks" in the place where you were living? Would you say anything about it?

Notes

Erin Go Bragh

Episode 13

Family of Origin
Family Roles
Family Stressors
Parent-Child Relations

Segment # 1: Dom learns that his father in Ireland is seriously ill. Before Dom packs for his trip home, Jon meets with a record producer but they tell him they are not interested. As Dom arrives at the airport, he is surprised to find that his mother and father are both there to meet him. He had expected his father to be much too ill to do so. We also learn that Dom has a sister, Barbara, and two more siblings who are also in the United States.

Segment # 2: Dom is named for his father. As the two of them discuss his life in America, his parents inquire about Jon. The producers conveniently cut to Jon back in California who we learn is entering a country music contest. Dom has the opportunity to hang out with his sister and his cousin Peter. They get carried away and arrive home late for dinner. They attempt to tell a lie to cover up the real reason they are late, but no one is having any part of it.

Segment # 3: Back in California we learn that Jon will be singing at the Borderline Club. During the first round, Jon sings "Blame It On Texas" while Tim and Irene, Beth A., and Beth S. cheer him on from the audience. After attending a football (soccer) game, Dom says good-bye to his family and boards the plane bound for the U.S. Jon wins the first round of the contest and sings "Here In The Real World" as his encore.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

There are several episodes in the series that deal rather specifically with family of origin. Episode # 15 provides additional insights into Jon's family; Episode # 19 introduces us to Beth S.'s mom and provides a number of details about her family. Of all these episodes, this one perhaps provides the best illustrations. Note in particular the way Dom looks at his mother as the second segment begins. Dom expresses his feelings that he and his father have never been that close, but he wants to resolve those issues while he can. The entire episode explores the full range of family relationships.

Since Dom's visit is prompted by his father's illness, this episode is a good example of family stressors and how they may affect communication among family members.

This episode also illustrates the cost of using lies in communication. When Dom and his sister arrive late, they attempt to spare their mother's feelings and get themselves off the hook by concocting a story that ends up being unbelievable.

Discussion Questions

What message, if any, is conveyed by naming Dom after his father?

Think about your relationships with your mom and dad. Are you close? Distant? Has the relationship with each of them changed as you've gotten older? Do you expect them to change in the future? How are these changes reflected in your communication with your parents?

How does stress in a family affect or alter the communication among the family members? Does it make it better, worse, or just different?

When you are performing, receiving some kind of recognition, or playing sports, what message is communicated by the presence of your family and friends?

What is the cost of telling even a small lie? Why do we tell lies? Is this part of good communication?

Notes

Beth S. and Tami: 15 Minutes In The Spotlight

Episode 14

Self-concept
Self-monitoring

Segment # 1: Jon, Beth S., and Tami talk about getting what they want from life. Beth S. continues her quest for an acting career. Her agent has told her that she needs a good "head shot," so she has arranged to meet with a photographer. In the recording studio, we see Tami working with her producer, for whom she doesn't hold much affection.

Segment # 2: Tami is at work at the AIDS clinic. She has arranged for Mike from the clinic, who is also HIV positive, to conduct a class at the house on "safe sex." Everyone gets a supply of condoms and appropriately shaped fruit on which to practice. Tami decides that she wants to quit her job and devote full attention to her music career. Beth S., Tami, and Jon discuss their ambitions and the future.

Segment # 3: Beth S. and some friends are organizing an actor's showcase and are auditioning people. Tami goes to a psychic but doesn't believe the woman's advice. Instead, Tami goes to ITT technical school for an aptitude test in electronics; she does very well, but no one at the house really believes she is going to become a technician. Instead, she goes to the dentist and has her jaw wired shut so she can lose weight. A number of the people in the house react to her decision; most feel that wiring her jaw shut is not a good thing to do.

Tami goes to her supervisor and resigns from her job at the clinic. The supervisor remains calm, but the nonverbal expressions suggest that she is quite displeased.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

For some of the participants, we are forced to piece together information about their self-images from bits gathered over a number of episodes. In this case, we learn a great deal about Tami in a single shot. In combination with what we learn about Beth S., it makes this a good episode to illustrate how self-concept affects communication. This episode also provides a particularly strong example of "judging" response when Tami has her jaw wired shut. Some of the house members are vocal about Tami's choices during this episode, while others remain silent. This serves as a discussion starter about self-monitoring.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever decided to do something that was unpopular with your friends or family? How did you go about telling them your decision? How did they react?

Do you think Beth S. is a secure or insecure person? What did you learn in this episode that would support your position? How does she communicate her level of security?

Do you think Tami is a secure or insecure person? What did you learn in this episode that would support your position? How does she communicate her level of security?

When someone tells you that they are going to do something, which, in your opinion, is inappropriate for them, do you tell them how you feel? If so, how do you do that?

When Tami told her supervisor at work that she was quitting, what did you hear the supervisor say? Did her nonverbal communication agree with her words?

Notes

A Fish Out of Water

Episode 15

Cognitive Dissonance
Family of Origin
Family Roles

Segment # 1: In the living room of the house is a large fish tank. Jon discovers that the blue fish has died and talks about the problems "new fish" face in becoming acclimated to the water. As a result of his appearance in the talent show, Jon receives a phone call from some movie producers who are doing a film about a country singer. Dom can't believe Jon has fallen into such an opportunity. Jon calls Irene to tell her about his good fortune. Jon meets the producers just before departing for a visit back home to Owensboro. The Brennan family and a number of members of Jon's fan club are at the airport to meet him when he arrives.

Segment # 2: Aaron has decided that the rest of the members of the house don't really understand what his life at college is like, so he invites Dom and Glen to join him one day at school (UCLA). Dom notes that the only thing wrong is that there are no bars on campus. In describing Owensboro, Jon calls it "home sweet home." We meet Goldie, a woman who has been singing country music most of her life and who has taken Jon under her wing and is trying to help him further his career. He makes a special appearance at his old school and then performs at Goldie's Opera House later that night. At the Brennan house, Jon tells his mother about the movie producers; she seems to not be particularly pleased at the prospect of her son being in a Hollywood film.

Segment # 3: Jon arrives back in Los Angeles and talks about experiencing culture shock all over again. At the house, he and Dom talk some more about the movie. Dom and Aaron go surfing, but Dom really doesn't get the hang of it. After a number of calls to the movie producers without getting through or being called back, Jon decides he isn't interested in the movie. Just as well — they have chosen someone else for the part.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

Jon is faced with a potential dilemma in this episode. He has been asked to audition for a part that is in conflict with his personal values. When he returns home, he returns to those values and finds them to be very comfortable, but he also sees the movie role as a vehicle to get him the singing career he wants so much.

Visually, the producers provide a good feel of what life is like for Jon in Owensboro, but they fail to capture the same level of family interaction that was present in Episode # 13 when Dom goes to Ireland. This episode is probably best used in combination with others to compare and contrast both individual self-concepts and family types.

Discussion Questions

Based on the information you learned from this episode and any previous episodes you have seen, what is Jon's relationship with each of his family members?

In your opinion, does Jon really want the role in the movie? Why or why not? What does he say or do that would support your position?

College life is somewhat different than life in "the real world." How do you explain what it's like to your family and friends who have never experienced it? Do you think Aaron does a good job of communicating his feeling about school to the house members?

Why does Jon say that he experiences culture shock for the second time when he returns to Los Angeles after returning from his visit to Owensboro? If he left L.A. again and then returned once more, do you think he would still experience culture shock?

When you find yourself in a new city or with people from a culture different than your own, what is it about their communication that has the potential to make you feel uncomfortable? Do you think everyone feels the same type of discomfort? If not, what type of individual may find different cultures more interesting than threatening?

How does Jon feel when he finds out he didn't get the part in the movie? How does he learn that they have chosen someone else? Is it possible to *not communicate*?

Notes

Perch Takes Over

Episode 16

Conflict Management
Family Maintenance
Family Stages
Social Penetration
Uncertainty Reduction

Segment # 1: After arriving from Philadelphia, it appears that Glen's band, "Perch," has taken over the house. After several weeks of this, the house members are quite upset with Glen. The final straw seems to be when Glen arranges for his friend Noel, "the performance artist," to do his act for 30 strangers in the house. At a regularly scheduled house meeting, Glen becomes quite verbally abusive, telling the others that "nobody talks" in this house. Aaron falls into his usual role as mediator.

Segment # 2: Glen suggests a question and answer game so that he and the others can get to know each other better. Questions are addressed to a specific individual and submitted anonymously. They are then answered in front of everyone. The answers provide interesting insights into each of the house members.

Segment # 3: Beth A. suggests to Jon that the house do some sort of project for Earth Day. They finally decide to make sandwiches for the homeless. Everyone pitches in, both financially and in preparing and distributing the food. Jon appears in the finals at the Borderline Club's talent contest and wins singing "Boot Scoot Boogie."

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The arrival of "Perch" has clearly caused a major conflict in the house. Glen is a newcomer and yet has managed to upset an already delicate balance in the family system by introducing a number of additional individuals. In this episode, family maintenance becomes a major and necessary focus.

The question and answer game illustrates one way to attempt better group communication. It is an excellent teaching tool, but should be viewed in the context of what problems are inherent in its approach as well as the benefits. While the anonymity of the questions encourages people to ask questions, it denies the person being asked the opportunity to know the context in which the question is asked (that is, who asked the question). There is also great pressure for each person to answer all the questions put to them. This amounts to forced self-disclosure and has the potential for very negative results. The nature of some of the questions also suggests that some house members are attempting social penetration at a level deeper than that which has been self-selected by others.

The Earth Day project and the presence of all the members of the house at Jon's performance at the Borderline Club suggest that at this stage in their development, the group has become a "family" in some sense of the word. The discussions among the house members make it clear that they do support each other in a number of ways.

Discussion Questions

Glen says that "nobody talks." Do you agree or disagree? What evidence is there to support your position?

Is it appropriate for Glen, as a relative stranger to the group, to demand changes in the group's behavior?

Do you think the "question and answer game" is a good communication tool? What are its advantages? What are its disadvantages?

Has the family group of *The Real World* changed in its character since the first few weeks? Have individual family roles changed or stayed the same? Have they become more clear to you as a viewer or less clear?

What is the significance of the group's participation in feeding the homeless? Do you feel this activity helps define the group as a family?

How might the problems associate with "Perch's" arrival been minimized through more effective communication?

During the question and answer game, what do both the verbal and the nonverbal communication tell you about each of the member's listening styles?

Notes

Leftovers

NOTE: This episode appears to have central themes of love, sex, and romance, but the scenes seem to be more disjointed than most episodes suggesting that it may have been assembled from footage leftover from earlier episodes.

Episode 17

Not Recommend As A Stand-Alone Example

Segment # 1: Jon, Beth S., and Tami play the "Facts of Life" game. As usual, Jon is embarrassed by the questions, but that doesn't keep him from playing. Beth S.'s ex-boyfriend Tony comes for a visit. Tony is angered when Beth S. has to leave to have more pictures taken. Tami discusses her relationship with her new man, Tootie, while Beth S. bakes up a batch of cookies to send to another male friend of hers, Tim. After becoming angry because Tootie hasn't called, Tami breaks up with him.

Segment # 2: This part of the episode focuses on Dom and his girlfriends. Aaron talks about relationships as well. Aaron seems committed to a high ideal and says he won't settle for anything less. Dom seems to be more interested in playing the field and just enjoying life for now.

Segment # 3: Beth A. goes to a gay rodeo. Glen and Beth A. become very close as the rest of the house members try and understand why. Several members of the house decide that it's time to have a big party. Things get pretty wild. Dom ends up with two of his girlfriends there at the same time.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The strength of this episode lies in its ability to illustrate a variety of close interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, we aren't given much in the way of actual conversation to illustrate these relationships. Instead there is a great deal of "talking to the camera." As a result, this episode is not recommended unless you wish to tie some of the scenes to other episodes.

Discussion Questions

Why does Jon seem to be embarrassed by the questions in the "Facts of Life" game? Would you be embarrassed? Would you play anyway?

This episode gives us some insights into the close relationships of Beth S., Dom, and Aaron, and to a lesser extent several other group members. Can you closely identify with any of them in this regard?

Based on what you know about their feelings towards close personal relationships, speculate on how each member of the group might communicate differently with their partners.

Notes

Protocol

Episode 18

Attribution Theory
Cultural Influences
Power Alliances
Rules Theory

Segment # 1: The group prepares to fly to Cozumel for a vacation. The house is clearly split into cliques: Tami/Beth S./Jon — Aaron/Dom — Beth A./Glen. Each of these groups ends up sharing a room. As soon as they reach the registration desk, the split up begins. At least some of the group see this trip as having the potential to bring them all closer together, but the events that occur suggest otherwise. In a bikini contest that turns out to be the male guests in drag, Glen gets quite boisterous. While the contest goes on, Dom passes out drunk on the beach.

Segment # 2: Dom is o.k. but completely out of it; he denies that he has had too much to drink. The group goes diving (suggesting the fish metaphor again) and then horseback riding. While driving motor scooters, Beth S. falls and is certain she has broken her arm even though the doctor tells her that there is nothing wrong.

Segment # 3: In town, the larger group separates once again. When they run into each other later, Beth A. says that she is embarrassed by the way Jon acted in town (he did a chicken dance). Aaron and Glen both make speeches about respecting local culture. (The producers cut to earlier scenes of Glen's behavior at the bikini contest.) Tami takes great offense that she has been included in this evaluation and attempts to separate herself from Jon. Ultimately, everyone becomes very angry. In individual camera segments, the group members face the reality that their hopes of becoming closer to the others did not materialize.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

While there are other examples in this series of the ways in which people interpret situations to their own benefit, none are quite as vivid as the examples in this episode. The entire issue of respecting another culture rings completely false in light of the behavior of those making the accusations. It is interesting to note that whereas in the beginning of the series the primary cultural differences were perceived among the house members themselves and fell along the lines of white and black, country and city, Beth A., Aaron, Dom, and Glen now have chosen to go outside the group for cultural comparisons. Since Tami and Jon are now on the same "side," the old arguments no longer seem to hold.

The rules that hold in the beach house in Venice aren't necessarily the same as they are in a Mexican resort village. The house cliques seem to become even stronger when they are given the opportunity to have rooms with doors that lock.

Additionally, this episode shows how similar behaviors can be interpreted differently depending on to whom they are attributed. Glen and Dom's potentially embarrassing behaviors seem acceptable to Aaron and Beth A., while those of Tami, Beth S., and Jon are perceived as inappropriate. The camera shows that Glen and Dom's behaviors are equally or perhaps more embarrassing than the others.

Discussion Questions

Do you act differently when you go on vacation? If so, why?

Was there any basis for the group's hope that their vacation would bring them any closer together?

Do you think a different type of vacation or group activity would have resulted in a different outcome?

What special communication problems does one encounter when in a foreign country?

Notes

The Polish Voice of Cleveland

Episode 19

Conflict Management
Family of Origin
Parent-Child Relations

Segment # 1: Beth S. is on the phone with one of her ex-boyfriends who is threatening to kill himself if Beth won't see him. Beth explains the relationship in the confessional. Later Jon attempts to console Beth. Beth S. receives a call from her mom; she is coming to Venice for a visit. Mrs. S. has very "old world" values. She is the "Polish Voice of Cleveland" — with shows on two radio stations there. Beth laments that her mother's work always comes first, even on Christmas day. Beth's mom is appalled at the disarray present in the house and sets about to wash the dishes, vacuum, and generally clean up. She cooks dinner for everyone in the house.

Segment # 2: Beth S. and her mother, along with Jon, go out for dinner. Beth's mom is very manipulative in everything she says about her daughter. Jon becomes uncomfortable listening to the two of them try and talk. Sometime later, there is a fight between Glen and Beth S. at the dinner table. Glen is verbally abusive. Jon tries again to console Beth S. In the meantime, Aaron decides he has had it with "the Beth situation" as well and concludes that direct confrontation is the key to resolving it.

Segment # 3: Beth S. talks about her mom some more to the camera. After mom leaves, Beth S. and Aaron talk about their problems with each other and seem to come to some resolution. In a single interview with the camera, Beth A. talks about Beth S. saying that she appreciates Beth S.'s energy and desire to stay active. Beth S. also talks to Glen. While they agree that it is good to get it out in the open, the discussion that is presented really doesn't seem to resolve anything. The whole group goes out to a "paint wars" site to let off some steam. Beth S. is the final winner.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

The opening scenes with Beth on the phone with her ex-boyfriend illustrate the communication problems that can occur when one party sees the relationship as over but the other party does not.

The only mother-daughter relationship we have observed up until now is the interaction between Tami and her mother. What we are shown of that relationship is colored by the circumstances under which the communication takes place. This episode provides several excellent examples of direct communication between Beth S. and her mother. We see the "generation gap" as well as differing perceptions about the reasons for each one's behaviors. We also get to see first hand how these interactions appear to someone outside the family (in this case, Jon).

The scenes between Aaron and Beth S. do a good job of capturing an honest attempt at resolving conflict.

Discussion Questions

How do your parents talk when they are around your friends? Is it the same or different than when they talk to you or to other members of your family?

How do you communicate with your parents in the presence of your friends? Is it the same or different than when you talk to them alone or to other members of your family?

What do you say when you are with a friend and his or her parent(s) and a disagreement occurs between the two of them? How do you feel?

Do you communicate the same way with your mom as you do with your dad? Do they communicate the same way with each other as they do with you?

Do mothers and daughters communicate differently than mothers and sons? Do fathers and daughters communicate differently than fathers and sons?

Why do you think Aaron finds it necessary to confront "the Beth situation" directly? What communication skills might each of them have used to avoid or reduce the conflict between the two of them? Do you feel things will change as a result of their talk?

What, if any, differences did you notice in the conversation between Beth S. and Aaron and the similar conversation between Beth S. and Glen at the outdoor cafe? Do you think one of them was more effective from a communication standpoint than the other?

Do you have an activity like "paint wars" that lets you diffuse your hostilities? Are there any communication skills you have developed that accomplish the same thing?

Notes

The Showcase

Episode 20

Power Issues
Self-concept

Segment # 1: Through a series of events, it has been decided that several members of the house are going to present a musical showcase. Jon, Aaron's band "Perch," Tami's group "Reality," and the band Dom manages, "Stick Kitty," will all perform. Dom is in charge of producing the entire show with the help of others in the house. Tami takes exception to the schedule Dom has arrived at and attempts to "tell it the way it's going to be." Tami makes it clear that she sees this as her show and wants it done to suit her. She has invited significantly more than her share of people to the show and refuses to sit through the other groups' performances.

Segment # 2: On the day of the showcase, Beth S. offers to help. Everyone is shown getting ready to go on. Jon ends up being the show's opener and sings the Garth Brooks tune "Rodeo."

Segment # 3: Dom's band, "Stick Kitty," is next, followed by Tami and her group. The house members are a bit surprised when they learn that "Reality" has chosen to lip-synch their entire performance. Tami explains that they have chosen to concentrate on their dancing today instead of worrying about the music. It also turns out that Tami is not the lead vocalist of the group, though the lead singer is quite talented. "Perch" closes the show.

Communication Concepts Illustrated

It appears that this episode was a way for the producers to "pay off" several of the participants by giving their acts exposure on MTV. While the showcase itself doesn't provide much in the way of examples of communication behaviors, the sub-theme of Tami's attempt to impose her will on the planning for the showcase makes for a very interesting case study. A number of relational power issues are present as well as each performer's self-concept.

Discussion Questions

Based on the communication you observed in the early part of this episode, who is in charge of making arrangements for the showcase? Would you have picked the same person if the decision was up to you? Why or why not?

What sorts of messages did Tami send to the other members of the house who were participating in the showcase? What was the content of the messages? What did the relational component appear to be relaying about her feelings?

Aaron is notably missing from a leadership role in this episode. What conditions may have caused him to not assume the central role he usually takes in house matters?

Did all of the members of the house have the chance to participate in some way in putting on the showcase?

How do you feel when most of the members of your family or your roommates are involved in a project but you are not?

Based on what Tami has said about her group in previous episodes, did "Reality" live up to your expectations? Who did you expect to be the lead singer in the group? Were you surprised when they elected to lip-synch to a recorded track?

How did the other house members react to Tami's performance? Jon's performance? Glen and "Perch"?

Notes

Goodbye Yellow Brick Beach House

Episode 21

Family Stages
Relationship Stages

Segment # 1: *The Real World II* house members have just received a copy of *TV Guide* that previews the show. This happens just as the filming is coming to an end. There is both tension and humor in the fact that *TV Guide* has erroneously identified Beth S. as being a lesbian. This leads to a discussion of how the press will cover the entire experience.

Aaron prepares for his final examinations. The last day for the group to live in the house is also the day of Aaron's graduation from UCLA and the entire house plans to turn out to support him.

Segment # 2: People are packing and getting ready to leave, pausing at times to reflect on the experience. Tami tries to predict the future.

Segment # 3: In summarizing the experience, Beth S. notes that, "I think we're all learning the art of communication." Beth A. talks about the importance of communication as well. With everyone packed into the confessional, they attempt to leave a final message for their viewers. At some point, however, Aaron gets upset that everyone is being silly and walks out. Aaron wanted everyone to be "sincere." The others note that perhaps it was a fitting end after all — still disagreeing right up to the end.

To the sound of Jon singing "Here In The Real World," we see everyone hugging and saying good-bye. At the end, the telephone answering machine answers with Jon's voice, "No one is here right now. Leave your message at the beep. Yee haw!"

Communication Concepts Illustrated

It's hard not to be emotional about termination even when there have been a number of problems in a relationship. This final episode provides plenty of examples of the termination process including Aaron's seeming displeasure at the end. The comments by the house members about communication are wonderful endorsements of the value of communication courses.

The final episode goes beyond interpersonal communication to contemplate the role of mass communication on interpersonal relationships and the ways in which the lines between public and private spheres continue to blur.

Discussion Questions

Most people would agree that it's usually sad and sometimes painful when a relationship that one considers good comes to an end. How do you feel when you reach the end of a somewhat "rocky" relationship like the one *The Real World II* group experienced during their time together?

How important is communication to interpersonal relationships in general and family relationships in particular?

In what ways was *The Real World II* family like a more traditional family? In what ways was it different?

Most of us do not have our daily lives broadcast across the country on national cable television. What influence, if any, do you think the presence of the cameras and the technical staff had on the communication styles and development of interpersonal relationships of the house members?

The video technology that makes *The Real World* an economically viable show for MTV also makes possible shows like *Cops*. In the past, our culture has generally regarded private residences as exactly that — private. The public sphere, or the "outside" world, is brought into our homes through television and other media. At the same time, shows that use video-vérité techniques, such as those employed by the producers of *The Real World*, make it possible to record and broadcast the "private sphere" to an international audience. Even *America's Favorite Home Videos* and similar shows encourage us to share our private moments with a national audience.

Since the line between public and private spheres continues to blur, changing in part with the introduction of new technologies, what do you think are the likely effects of this phenomenon on interpersonal and family communication? Is it a good thing, a bad thing, or just something different without being either good or bad?

Would you apply to be part of *The Real World* family? If so, based on what you saw in these episodes, what do you feel are the most important communication skills you would need in order to make the most of your experience?

Notes

A Guide for Episode Selection

This table is intended as a guide in the selection of appropriate episodes to illustrate specific communication concepts. Note that only the most prominent themes in each episode are reflected by this chart. For instance, excellent examples of nonverbal communication can be found in nearly every episode of *The Real World II*, but may not be the primary value of the episode for classroom instruction.

This chart reflects the concepts highlighted in the boxes featured with the synopsis pages.

	Episode																			
General Concepts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Climate				●																	
Competence																					
Compliance								●													
Conflict						●	●									●			●		
Culture	●																	●			
Emotive Language			●			●	●														
Empathy						●	●														
Facework		●	●								●										
Gender						●	●		●	●											
Initial Attraction	●	●																			
Listening								●													
Metacommunication				●		●	●														
Nonverbal	●					●	●														
Power																				●	
Relationship Stages	●		●	●							●										●
Self-concept	●									●				●						●	
Self-disclosure		●						●		●		●									
Self-monitoring	●							●				●									
Stereotypes	●	●	●											●							
Family Issues																					
Family Maintenance								●				●				●					
Family of Origin	●									●			●		●				●		
Family Roles		●			●								●		●						
Family Stages									●		●					●					●
Family Stressors										●			●								
Parent-Child Relations													●						●		
Power Alliances					●													●			
Theories																					
Attribution																		●			
Cognitive Dissonance															●						
Costs and Rewards				●																	
Rules		●										●						●			
Social Penetration		●						●		●		●				●					
Uncertainty Reduction	●	●						●				●				●					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Episode																				

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Activities

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Getting Involved in *The Real World*

Suggested Activities

The activities that are presented here lend themselves to several formats. They can be given as written assignments, discussed by the class as a whole, or considered in smaller groups.

You may wish to begin by having each student identify which participant in *The Real World* they most identify with. Form "fan clubs" and have each "club" discuss why they chose the person they did.

In other situations, it may be helpful to mix groups and allow them to role play the situations they view in the series.

Who's Your Favorite Participant in *The Real World*?

Choose either your favorite participant in *The Real World II* or the person with whom you most identify or find most interesting in the series. Keep in mind that you have nine (9) choices since two of the original members of the house were later replaced. Using the concepts you have learned in class, discuss the interpersonal communication behavior of the person you have chosen. How might the person you have chosen improve his or her communication skills? What did she or he do well? What did he or she do poorly? Use specific examples of the *communication behaviors* used. You may use examples from any of the 21 episodes.

Write A Fan Letter

After viewing several episodes of *The Real World II* so that you feel you are beginning to know the participants pretty well, choose one and write a fan letter to him or her.

Tell him why you are writing. Do you find her attractive? Do the two of you seem to have common interests? Is there something he did that particularly impressed you? Do you think she's a good role model? Use your imagination and your very best interpersonal communication skills to express your feelings towards this person. Write the letter just as you would without it being a class assignment. If you would like a response, don't be too shy to ask for one! (Hint: a self-addressed stamped envelope never hurts your chances. Even if you don't get a personal response, you may at least get an acknowledgement that your letter was received.)

Analyze a Dyad in *The Real World*

Discuss the communication that occurs in one of the dyads in the house. Using the concepts you have learned in class, discuss the interpersonal communication behavior of the dyad you have chosen. How might the dyad you have chosen improve their communication skills? What did they do well? What did they do poorly? Use specific examples of their *communication behaviors*. You may use examples from any of the 21 episodes.

Write To The Producers Of *The Real World*

Write an actual letter to the producers of *The Real World* explaining why you think the show does or does not provide good examples of interpersonal communication skills. Use specific examples and relate them to the concepts you have learned in class. Keep in mind that a *good example* is not necessarily the same as an example of *good communication*. Concepts can be well illustrated by examples that show poor communication skills as well as those that show good communication skills.

If you believe that episodes of *The Real World* do a good job of illustrating the concepts taught in a communication class, discuss the specific elements of the program that make it a good learning tool.

If you believe that episodes of *The Real World* do a poor job of illustrating the concepts taught in a communication class, discuss the specific elements of the program that make it a poor or uninteresting learning tool.

You may use examples from the episodes we viewed in class or any of the other 21 episodes. Regardless of whether you like or dislike the show, be sure to include your suggestions on ways in which the show can be improved — especially ways in which it might be more effectively produced for use in learning about interpersonal communication. Don't forget to sign and date your letter. Address your letter to: Bunim-Murray Productions, 10 Universal Plaza, 33rd Floor, Universal City, CA 91608.

Who Would You Pick?

After viewing Episode # 8, stop the tape before the house members make their choice of a new roommate. Discuss which of the three candidates you would most like to have as your own personal housemate. Might you choose someone different for the group based on your perceptions of the dynamics present among *The Real World* family? What qualities do you think are important in a roommate for the participants in the show? Are those qualities different than your own?

After viewing the rest of the episode, discuss whether you feel the group made a good decision. Try and predict how the introduction of the new member will affect the communication climate in the house. If time allows, watch Episode # 12 and make additional predictions of what effect the second new house member will have.

A Family Under Stress

After viewing Episode # 13, Dom's trip home to Ireland, discuss the relationship he has with his parents and his sister. Is your family similar to Dom's or different? In what ways?

How is Dom's relationship with his "real" family different than his relationship with *The Real World* family? If you have one or more roommates, compare that relationship to your own family of origin.

Have your relationships with your parents and brothers and sisters changed over time? In what ways? Do you think they will continue to change throughout your lifetime?

When your family (either your family of origin or your family of choice) experiences a stressful situation, how does the communication among family members change? If you have had the chance to view Episode # 10 where Tami's mother comes to support her during the abortion, compare the communication present in these two different stressful family situations.

Different Strokes

After watching Episode # 13, watch Episode # 15 which includes Jon's visit to his hometown of Owensboro, Kentucky, and/or Episode # 19 where Beth S.'s mom comes to California for a visit.

Discuss which family is most like your own. In what ways are Dom's mother, Jon's mother, and Beth S.'s mother similar? How are they different? Do they each communicate differently with their offspring? Discuss the same questions for Jon and Dom's fathers.

Alliances

There are several clearly defined groups within the larger group of all *The Real World II* participants. Aaron and Dom form a special bond; the women seem to always do things together, with the exception that Tami goes her own way at times. In relatively quick fashion, David becomes a problem for everyone, while Jon hangs out with the women (especially Irene while she's there) if with anyone at all. With the introduction of Beth Anthony and Glen, they form their own bond. Explore how these alliances were created. Did everyone end up belonging to the sub-group to which they really wanted to belong? Are alliances good for family communication? Did the communication patterns within each sub-group stay the same or did they change over time?

Communication Styles

Communicators have varying styles that are often identified as being either masculine or feminine. The choice of style has very little, if anything, to do with biological gender. They are simply convenient terms based on the traditional differences perceived between the ways women and men communicate.

Do you think Jon was more comfortable talking to the men or the women in the house or was he equally at ease or ill at ease with either group? What, if any, differences can you identify between the conversations the women had among themselves (with Jon included at times) and the conversations the men had among themselves? How does this compare to the communication style each individual used when both the women and men were together as one big group?

A Letter Home

Take on the identity of one of the participants in *The Real World II*. Write a letter home to your mom or dad, one of your brothers or sisters, or a close friend back in your hometown. Tell them what it's like living in a house with six strangers and having your life captured on videotape everyday.

Since your relatives are really very interested in the communication process involved, be sure to include examples of how the people in the house talk to each other. You might discuss who you find it easy to talk to, who plays what role in your new family, and what problems there have been that were the result of a communication breakdown. You may write about all of the house members or just a few of them.

If you prefer, you can write your letter from the perspective of "a fly on the wall." That is, you may write as if you were the eighth, perhaps "invisible," member of the group. It's sort of like being the "fifth Beatle."

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